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BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. 787.

THE SPANISH MATCH; BY W. H. AINSWORTH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

Carlos Estuardo soy,
  Que, siendo amor mi guia,
Al cielo de España voy
  Por ver my estrella Maria.

LOPE DE VEGA.

THE

SPANISH MATCH;

OR,

CHARLES STUART AT MADRID.

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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1865.

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THE SPANISH MATCH.

BOOK I.

THE JOURNEY OF JACK AND TOM SMITH TO MADRID.

I.

By whom the Journey to Madrid was projected; and how it was proposed to the King.

On Monday, the 17th of February, in the year 1623, King James I. was alone in his private cabinet in the palace of Whitehall, engaged in perusing a despatch, which he had just received from the Earl of Bristol, then ambassador-extraordinary to the court of Madrid.

With the appearance of the monarch the reader must be familiar, so it is scarcely necessary to describe him, but we may mention, that on this occasion, as on most others, he was cased in a black silk doublet, so thickly padded as to be proof against stroke of sword or dagger. This bolstered doublet gave him an air of excessive and unnatural corpulency, though in reality his frame was very meagre, as was shown by his legs, while his huge bombasted trunk-hose greatly impeded his movements and increased the natural ungainliness of his figure. There were more marks of age and decrepitude about James than were warranted by his years — he was then only fifty-seven — his cheeks were hollow, his

eyes blear, his limbs shrunken, and he tottered in his gait like a feeble old man. His whole appearance, indeed, betokened that he was well-nigh worn out, and such was the opinion entertained of him by the courtiers, who, feeling assured he could not last long, had already begun to pay their devotions to the rising sun.

The intelligence conveyed to the king was evidently far from agreeable to him. Not only did he manifest considerable irritation, as by the aid of a powerful pair of glasses he got through the despatch, but at last he threw it down with an oath — the British Solomon, as is well known, swore lustily when angered — and exclaimed, "By my saul! I will no longer be trifled with. The King of Spain is playing me false. I will break off the marriage-treaty at once, and recal Bristol." He then seized a pen, and adjusting his spectacles, began to indite a letter to the ambassador, in which he gave full vent to his displeasure, by no means mincing his phrases, but setting down whatever came uppermost.

While he was thus occupied, the door was opened, and two persons entered the cabinet. As they were unannounced by the gentleman-usher, James, among whose many infirmities deafness was numbered, did not hear them come in, and his back being towards the door, he did not remark their presence. So he continued his task, under the impres-

sion that he was alone, concocting his sentences aloud, and thus acquainting those near him with the secrets of his despatch, as well as diverting them by the coarse energy of his expressions. The foremost of the two would have interrupted him, but was checked by his companion, who whispered in his ear, "Let him alone. He will never send off that despatch."

The individual to whom these words were addressed, was a young man about two-and-twenty, whose noble lineaments and dignified deportment proclaimed him of the highest rank. In fact, he looked infinitely more like a king than the old monarch near whom he stood. His features were characterised by a gravity far beyond his years, and a shade of melancholy sat upon his brow, heightening the interest inspired by his handsome and thoughtful countenance. His eyes were large and black, his forehead lofty and capacious, denoting the possession of a powerful intellect, while his looks breathed taste and refinement. Moustaches and a pointed beard harmonised well with his somewhat lengthy visage, and his dark locks, divided above the temples, fell down in ringlets upon the starched lace ruff encircling his throat, and which served as a frame to his comely head — a head, once seen, never to be forgotten. His complexion was pale, inclining to swarthiness — a hue of skin sup-

posed to belong to one of saturnine temperament. He was about the middle height, but held himself so erect that he seemed taller than he was in reality. His figure was slender, but perfectly proportioned, and his demeanour, as we have intimated, full of grace and majesty. His habiliments were of white velvet, and became him well, the doublet and hose being puffed with azure silk, and the mantle lined with the same stuff. His sole ornament was the diamond star upon his cloak.

In this striking-looking personage there will be little difficulty, we apprehend, in recognising Charles Prince of Wales.

The prince's companion was likewise very handsome — handsomer, indeed, than the prince — but he lacked the dignity of manner and singularly highbred look that distinguished Charles. He was in the prime of manhood, being the prince's senior by about eight or nine years, and possessed a figure of unequalled symmetry. Well-favoured, however, as he was in form and feature, his haughty manner marred the effect of his good looks. His magnificent person needed no embellishment, yet his attire was splendid, his pink satin doublet and hose being covered with gems, while chains of large orient pearls hung from his neck down to his very girdle, which was likewise encrusted with precious stones. To the extraordinary personal advantages we have

described, George Villiers, Marquis of Buckingham — for he it was — added great accomplishments, mental as well as bodily. Clear-sighted, keen-witted, eloquent, and if not learned or profound, he had art enough to hide his deficiencies. He was expert in all manly exercises; rode better than any one at court, won all the prizes at the tilt-yard, and danced more gracefully than Sir Walter Raleigh.

Seven years ago, on his first appearance at court, where he was introduced as a rival to the then reigning favourite, Carr, Earl of Somerset, young Villiers's remarkable graces of person and captivating manner at once attracted the king's notice, and his rise was incredibly rapid. Favours were lavished upon him by the infatuated monarch; he was ennobled, and eventually raised to the highest posts in the state. To enumerate all the important offices with which he had been gratified by his doting master would be tedious, but it may be mentioned, in order to give an idea of his power and greatness at the period in question, that he was Lord High Admiral of England, Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, Constable of the Castle of Dover and of the royal Castle of Windsor, Lord President of the Council of War, Knight of the Garter, and first minister. Besides all these and many other posts and honours, he had a dukedom in expectancy.

Since his aggrandisement, however, Buckingham's character had materially changed. Affable at first to all, he had become excessively haughty and domineering, being insolent even to his royal master. Boundlessly profuse in expenditure, and insatiate, he well-nigh drained James's coffers. His entertainments were superb, surpassing in splendour those of the king. His retinue was that of a prince; his carriage was drawn by six horses, and if he rode forth a large escort attended him. No wonder that his insufferable arrogance and imperious deportment alienated his partisans and increased the number of his enemies — no wonder that his overthrow was frequently attempted. In vain. Buckingham proved too strong for his enemies. Favourite alike of father and son, of the king and the heir to the throne, he derided all opposition.

That Buckingham should have succeeded in ingratiating himself with a prince so grave and reserved in manner as Charles, whose character was so opposite to his own, and who was so likely to be distrustful of his advances, shows wonderful adroitness on his part, and proves incontestably that he possessed in the highest degree the art of pleasing. In order, however, to confirm his influence with the prince, he conceived a bold and singular project, to explain which a brief retrospect will be necessary.

James had long cherished the design of forming a matrimonial alliance for his son with Spain, and had made a formal proposition to Philip III. for the hand of his second daughter, the Infanta Maria; but though the offer was graciously received, and negotiations entered into, innumerable delays occurred, and his patience being at length exhausted by the dilatory Spanish cabinet, James put an end to the treaty. But though baffled, and offended by the duplicity which he supposed had been practised towards him, James had not altogether abandoned his design, and other circumstances occurring at a later period to render an alliance with Spain more than ever desirable in his eyes, he determined to renew his offer to Philip IV., who had just succeeded his father. In this matrimonial scheme, Charles, the principal person concerned in it, entirely acquiesced. Though he had never beheld the Infanta, the ravishing description he had received of her charms inflamed his breast with the strongest passion.

Accordingly, John Digby, Earl of Bristol, a diplomatist of approved ability, and who stood deservedly high in James's favour, was despatched as ambassador-extraordinary to Madrid to propose the match to Philip IV. The young king seemed far more favourably inclined to the alliance than his father had been, and declared that if the religious difficulties in the way of the union could be ad-

justed, all other points might be easily settled. But these difficulties were not easily removed. Months flew by — and the negotiation made little progress. As a preliminary measure, a dispensation had to be obtained from the Pope, Gregory XV., but this was refused unless the King of England engaged to mitigate the severe laws then in force against his Roman Catholic subjects. To this demand James assented, and began at once to carry his promise into effect. His ready compliance, however, induced the Pope to make further demands, and James was compelled to make additional concessions. Still the dispensation was delayed.

Things were in this state when the Conde de Gondomar, for many years ambassador to England, but who had recently returned to his own court, in order, if possible, to expedite the negotiation, wrote privately to Buckingham that he did not believe the match would ever take place, unless the prince came to Madrid to fetch his bride. "Bring him here," concluded Gondomar, "and the affair will be speedily settled."

The hint was not lost upon Buckingham. Persuaded that success would attend the proposed expedition, in which case the entire credit of accomplishing the union would attach to himself instead of to the Earl of Bristol, whom he hated as a rival, while the prince must needs feel grateful to him for

procuring him a consort, Buckingham proposed the journey to Charles, assuring him that it was the only means of accomplishing the object he had in view, and offered to accompany him.

Fired by the romantic nature of the project, which exactly suited his character, Charles at once agreed to the proposition, thanked Buckingham for his zeal, and manifested the utmost impatience to set forth upon the journey.

The grand difficulty was to obtain the king's consent. His majesty was sure to raise numerous objections to the expedition, but these Buckingham undertook to remove. The prince's impatience would not brook delay, so, after arranging a plan of action, they entered the cabinet as described on the morning in question, resolved to carry their point.

They came at the very nick of time, since James, in his present mood, might have broken the marriage-treaty, and so have effectually frustrated their design.

For a few minutes after their entrance, the king continued his despatch, reciting aloud what he was setting down. He then paused, and while he was reflecting, Charles, advancing towards his chair, made a reverence, and said, "When your majesty is at leisure I crave a word with you."

"Bide awee, Babie Charlie — bide awee!" ex-

claimed the king. "I'm engaged on yer ain business — that confounded alliance with Spain, which has given me more trouble than aught I ever undertook. But I'll make an end of it now. Ha! is that you, Steenie?" he added, noticing the favourite. "Saul o' my body, lads, I canna say that ye are either of you welcome to yer auld dad at this moment, for he has been sairly put out by a despatch just received from Bristol — fresh delays — new demands — enough to drive one stark mad. You maun gie up all thoughts of the Infanta, Babie Charlie, for she never can be yours. I am about to break off the match."

"Not so, sire — not so!" cried his son.

"But I say 'yea,'" vociferated James, testily. "Hear what I hae written to Bristol, and then ye'll understand whether I'm in earnest or no."

"Your majesty need not trouble yourself to read the despatch," remarked Buckingham. "We know what it contains. But in spite of all that has happened — in spite of the dissimulation and perfidy of Olivarez — in spite of Bristol's mismanagement — in spite of the Pope — the match *will* take place."

"Ye are wrang, Steenie — ye are wrang," cried James. "I tell ye, man, I am about to break it off."

"Would you undo your own work, just when it

is on the eve of accomplishment?" said Buckingham. "You are far too sagacious for that."

"Uds death! man, there's nae help for it," returned James. "I will mak nae mair concessions to please the Pope or the great Dule himsel, wha eggs him on. I hae made ower mony already."

"I should be the last to counsel your majesty to truckle to Rome," said Buckingham. "But you may dispense with the dispensation. I will stake my head that the match shall take place — ay, and before the end of April."

"Ye are a bauld man, Steenie — a verra bauld man," said James, laughing, "and can do maist things weel, but ye canna perform impossibilities."

"I can do what Bristol has failed to do, at all events," rejoined Buckingham. "And this is no idle boast, as your majesty will find, if you put me to the test."

"Ye say that safely, for ye ken fu' weel that I am not likely sae to try ye," observed James. "But let me make an end of my despatch."

At a sign from Buckingham, Charles then drew nearer to his father, and said, in an earnest voice, "I have a matter of importance to lay before your majesty, on which I desire to have your advice. But, before proceeding, I must have your royal word that you will not divulge the secret I am about to impart.

to any one — not even to your council. Otherwise, my lips will remain sealed."

"I hae nae secrets, as ye ken, frae Steenie," replied James, whose curiosity was aroused. "But sin' he is present, and will hear the secret — if he be not acquainted wi' it already, as I shrewdly suspect — there is na need to make an exception in his favour. Speak without fear, my bairn. I solemnly pledge you my royal word that I will keep your secret as close as I ought to keep my purse."

"Since I am thus encouraged," said Charles, "I can no longer hesitate to prefer my request. Gracious sovereign and father," he continued, prostrating himself before him, "grant me, I beseech you, permission to travel to Madrid to fetch the Infanta, whom you have chosen for my consort, but who, I feel assured, never will be mine unless I can thus obtain her. Instead of quenching the passion I have conceived for this adorable princess, the difficulties which have occurred during the long-protracted negotiation for her hand, have increased it. I shall never be happy without her, and indeed have vowed to take no other wife, so that, unless I win her, I shall be condemned to a life of celibacy, and your royal line will not be continued."

"Saints forfend!" cried James, uneasily.

"In proceeding in person to fetch my bride," pursued Charles, "I shall imitate the example of

my chivalrous ancestor, James V. of Scotland, who, journeying into France in quest of a consort, was rewarded by the hand of the Princess Madeleine, sole daughter of François I. Moreover, I shall copy, as I am bound to do, my wise and honoured father, whose ardent nature prompted him to sail to Denmark to gain the princess on whom he had set his affections. As James V. succeeded, and as you succeeded, sire, so shall I."

"Ahem!" exclaimed James, coughing dryly. "Dinna be guided by bonnie Jamie, Babie Charlie — dinna be guided by me. The wisest of men sometimes err, and I gave nae great proof of sagacity in taking that step."

"You gave unquestionable proof of spirit and of devotion to the queen my mother, sire," returned Charles. "Whatever the motive that influenced you, I honour you for it. But vouchsafe an answer to my request. Have I your permission to travel to Madrid?"

"Ye hae ta'en me so much by surprise that I can make nae direct response," returned James, cautiously. "The matter requires great consideration. When do you desire to set out?"

"Without delay — to-morrow," replied Charles.

"To-morrow!" ejaculated the king. "By my halidame! ye must be daft to think of it. Why, it will tak a month to fit out a fleet to convey ye to

Spain! Ask Steenie, who is Lord High Admiral, and he will explain to you the time it will take to get all ready."

"I need not ask the question, sire, since it is not my intention to go to Spain in that princely fashion. I design to travel by post, in disguise, as a simple gentleman, accompanied only by Buckingham, who has consented to go with me, and two or three attendants."

"Wha the deil has put this mad scheme into your head?" cried James, aghast. "Ride by post frae London to Madrid, like a courier! Is it befitting the heir to the throne of England to travel sae? Answer me that, Babie Charlie? Answer me that?"

"I shall travel incognito, sire, and shall not discover myself till I reach Madrid."

"Ye'll never reach Madrid if ye travel in that way, my puir bairn," said the king. "Hae ye reflectit on the perils of the journey? Grantin' ye get safely through France, whilk I mich misdoubt, ye will hae to cross great barren plains and steep mountains infested by robbers, and may be set upon in some spot where there is nae chance of succour, and barbarously murthered, and then I shall lose my twa darling boys, Babie Charles and Steenie. Say nae mair aboot it — spare your breath — nae arguments will move me."

"I shall not arise till you grant my request, sire," returned Charles, maintaining his position. "I go like a paladin of old to win the sovereign mistress of my heart, and were the expedition unattended by danger, I would not undertake it."

"Why, ye are as moonstruck as Don Quixote himself!" cried James. "But dinna suppose yer auld dad will suffer ye to commit such folly. He loves his bairn too dearly. What say you, Steenie?" he added to Buckingham. "Surely ye canna be party to this hair-brained scheme?"

"If the prince travels to Madrid as he desires to do, I shall accompany him," returned Buckingham. "Your paternal anxiety magnifies the dangers of the journey. I warrant me you will laugh heartily at our adventures when we come back."

"If ye ever *do* come back, dear lads, I promise ye I shall laugh, and that right heartily," said James. "But something tells me if ye gang to Spain in this way, I shall never set eyes on ye mair. Why not tarry for the fleet? Besides, I darena consent without consulting the council, and they may prohibit my son's departure."

"Very likely they would, sire," observed Charles. "But you have pledged me your royal word not to mention the matter to any one without my consent; and I hold you strictly to the promise."

"Idiot that I was to bind myself sae!" cried the

king. "But ye will gain naething by the stratagem — naething. I refuse my consent."

"Then the prince's death will lie at your door," rejoined Buckingham. "It will break his heart if he loses the Infanta — as he infallibly will, unless this expedient be adopted. Do I exaggerate, prince? — Speak!"

"Not in the least," replied Charles. "If I am thwarted, and robbed of my prize, I shall never survive the bitter disappointment."

"Was ever king sae sair beset?" groaned James. "I see plain eneuch that ye are baith in a plot against me, but ye shallna prevail. I am firm in my refusal."

"Hear me before you decide, sire," said Charles. "As Heaven shall judge me, if I am denied the Infanta, I will take no other wife. Your majesty professes to desire the marriage —"

"Professes to desire it!" interrupted James. "I desire naething on earth sae mich. I wad gie half my kingdom to accomplish it."

"Then let me go, and it is done," said Charles. "Hear me yet further, sire. Not only will my presence at Madrid bring the negotiation to an immediate and satisfactory issue, but it will ensure the restitution of his hereditary dominions to my brother-in-law, the Count Palatine. Philip IV. cannot refuse his aid to the Elector when I ask it."

"That wad, indeed, be a triumph gained, and wad gladden my heart, which is sair troubled in regard to my daughter Elizabeth," observed James. "I ought not to yield, for I hae mony misgivings as to the result of the expedition; but since ye are bent upon it, I will not hinder ye."

His point being thus gained, Charles sprang joyfully to his feet, and threw himself into his father's arms, who tenderly embraced him, exclaiming, "Heaven bless ye, my bonnie bairn, and grant ye a prosperous journey!"

"Your majesty's decision has been wisely made, and you will never rue it," observed Buckingham. "And now, since the affair is settled, it may be well to discuss the arrangements of the journey. We would defer to your majesty's opinion in the choice of our attendants. Whom do you recommend?"

"I need not search far to find one," returned James. "There is your secretary, Sir Francis Cottington, Babie Charlie, whom we have just elevated to a baronetcy. He has been attached to our embassy at Madrid, and knows the court intimately. You canna do better than take him. Sir Francis is a trusty and discreet man, in whom I have every confidence."

"Your confidence is well bestowed, sire," returned the prince. "I had fixed upon Cottington as

one of my attendants, provided my project met with your sanction. He is without, in the ante-chamber; but he knows nothing of the enterprise, for neither Buckingham nor myself have breathed a word of it to any one save your majesty."

"I will talk to him anon," observed the king. "Then there is your groom of the chamber, Endymion Porter, who has just returned frae Madrid. He speaks the language like a Spaniard, kens the people weel, and will be verra useful to you. Take him."

"Willingly — right willingly," returned Charles. "I had also thought of Endymion Porter. His perfect knowledge of the language, and familiarity with the manners of the people, will be a great help to us. As your majesty is aware, I speak Spanish indifferently well myself."

"And I very indifferently," remarked Buckingham. "But I make no doubt we shall get on well enough. Your majesty having assigned Cottington and Endymion Porter to the prince, I will crave permission to take as my own attendant my master of the horse, Sir Richard Graham."

"I approve your choice, Steenie," replied James. "Dick Græme is as handsome as Adonis, and his bra' looks and gallant bearing will charm the Spanish señoras. Like Babie Charlie, he may chance to find a wife in Madrid. But hauld! there is one point

which must not be forgotten. Does Dick speak Spanish?"

"Better than I do myself," returned Buckingham.

"That's na sayin' mich," laughed the king. "And now, lads, under what names do you mean to travel?"

"We have not thought of that," replied the prince. "Give us our designations, sire."

"The Palmerin de Inglaterra and Amadis de Gaula would suit ye best," said James, laughing; "but since these renowned names might prove inconvenient, I wad counsel you to adopt humbler appellations, and style yourselves the twa Smiths — Jock and Tam."

"Excellent!" cried Buckingham. "Your majesty has a rare humour. The prince shall be Jack Smith, and I will be Tom."

"I am quite content," remarked Charles. "As the Brothers Smith we will travel to Madrid."

"Will ye not send on a courier before you?" observed the king, pleased with their ready assent to his whim.

"That were to proclaim our secret to all the world," returned Charles. "None save our attendants must be made acquainted with our intended journey. There must be no avant courier to Paris or Madrid, or the project will be blown abroad and defeated.

We must take Philip and Olivarez by surprise. On our arrival at Madrid, we will proceed at once to the English embassy."

"The hotel in which Bristol resides, and where you will find him, has an odd name," remarked James. "It is called *La Casa de las siete Chimeneas*, or, in plain English, 'The House of Seven Chimneys.' Though so scantily supplied with chimneys, I believe it is a large mansion, sae ye will be weel accommodated; and I trust ye will gar every chimney reek while ye stay there."

"We will take good care of ourselves, never fear, sire," said Buckingham. "I like the name of the house. Seven is a lucky number. There are the Seven Sages of Greece — the Seven Champions — the Seven Stars — why not the Seven Chimneys?"

"One of the Pleiades has vanished," remarked James. "Count the chimneys when ye get to Madrid, and let me know that all are standing, for if ane be wanting, I shall think that your errand will prove unsuccessful. Ye said just now that Sir Francis Cottington is in the ante-chamber. Bid him come in. As he is to attend you, I may talk the matter over with him, I suppose?"

"Most assuredly, sire," replied Charles. "I should wish you to do so."

"Call him in, Steenie — call him in," said the

king; "and if Endymion Porter and Dick Græme chance to be in the ante-chamber, let them come in at the same time."

"All three were there when his highness and myself passed through," returned Buckingham. "Cottington will oppose the expedition," he added, in a whisper, to Charles.

"He will not dare to do so when he finds I am bent upon it," rejoined the prince, in the same tone.

"We shall see," observed Buckingham, as he stepped towards the door to execute the king's order.

II.

Showing who were chosen as Jack and Tom Smith's Attendants on the Journey.

FINDING that the three persons he sought were still in the ante-chamber, Buckingham directed the gentleman-usher in attendance to summon them, and, this being done, in another minute they were brought into the presence.

Sir Francis Cottington, who was first to enter, was of middle age, being born in 1576. Of a good Somersetshire family, after serving as secretary to Sir Philip Strafford during the reign of Elizabeth, he became attached to the embassy to Spain, and his long residence at Madrid had given him the look of a Spaniard, which was heightened by his olive

complexion, dark eyes, and jet-black moustache and beard. His habiliments were of murrey-coloured velvet, and a long Toledo hung from his side. As previously intimated, Sir Francis Cottington was now secretary to Prince Charles, and was, moreover, much in the king's confidence, who constantly consulted him about Spanish affairs, and was generally guided by his advice.

Endymion Porter came next. He was somewhat younger than Cottington, but though not so polished in manner or intelligent-looking as the prince's secretary, he had a pleasant countenance, and a goodly person.

The last to pay reverence to the king was an exceedingly handsome young man. Selected on account of his good looks and agreeable manner to the post of master of the horse, which he filled in Buckingham's princely household, Sir Richard Graham, by the elegance of his attire and personal graces, excited almost as much admiration as his magnificent patron. He was as tall as Buckingham, who was upwards of six feet high, but more powerfully built than the marquis. Graham's features were regular, and of classical mould, his complexion bright and fresh, his eyes dark blue, his locks brown and curled like those of Antinous, his beard and moustaches of the same hue, and his teeth superb. Sir Richard was a few months younger

than Prince Charles, and had recently been knighted by the king at Buckingham's instance.

Glancing round at the trio, James said, "I hae sent for ye, sirs, on a maist important matter, but, before confiding it to ye, I charge ye on your allegiance that ye keep it a profound secret. Mark weel what I say — a profound secret."

"Your majesty may rely upon us," returned the persons addressed.

"Weel, then," continued the king, "I will tell ye what it is without mair ado. Babie Charles and Steenie hae resolved to travel post to Madrid, to fetch the Infanta. Never stare, sirs — never stare! as if ye thought I were jesting — it's the truth. They mean to travel post, I tell ye, incognito, and with only three attendants, and have made choice of you."

This unexpected intelligence produced a marked effect on the hearers. All three were surprised by it, and Cottington trembled so violently, that he could scarcely support himself.

"What ails ye, Sir Francis?" cried James. "Dinna ye like the expedition?"

"Of a truth, my liege, I do not," replied Cottington; "and I would fain dissuade his highness from so hazardous an undertaking. I know the Spaniards well, and am therefore sensible of the risk he will incur."

"Ye hear that, Babie Charles?" cried James. "Sir Francis is an honest man, and speaks truth, however distasteful it may be, without fear. He is of our ain opinion."

"I have already told your majesty that I am determined to go, be the danger what it may," said Charles, glancing sternly at his secretary as he spoke. "I should be loth to take Sir Francis with me against his will."

"Let him stay behind," cried Buckingham. "How say you, sirs?" he added to the two others. "Are you content to go with us?"

"I shall be proud and happy to attend his highness and your grace," rejoined Endymion Porter; "and I see no risk whatever in the expedition. The prince will be heartily welcomed by his Spanish majesty — of that I am well assured."

"For my part, I shall account it a great distinction to share, however humbly, in an enterprise so heroic," observed Sir Richard Graham. "The proposed expedition is, in all respects, suited to a prince so chivalrous as his highness, aud I marvel not that he desires to undertake it. Danger enhances the glory of any great achievement, and, should peril occur, we shall know how to encounter it."

"Well spoken, Dick," cried Buckingham. "It is only Cottington who fears danger."

"It is my devotion to the prince that fills me with apprehension, and prompts me to dissuade him from the journey," returned Cottington. "If his highness will not heed my warning, I am ready to go with him, to guide him, and strive to protect him from peril, but I cannot reconcile it to myself to hold my tongue when advice may be useful."

"No more of this, sir," cried Charles, angrily.

"Nay, chide him not, Babie Charlie, he means weel," interposed James. "What hae ye to say, Sir Francis? Speak out, man — speak out — I command ye!"

"Since your majesty lays your injunctions upon me, I must obey," replied Cottington. "Not only do I feel that the expedition will be attended with many risks, but so far from promoting the match, I am confident it will put an end to it. Should the prince be so rash as to place himself in the hands of the Spaniards, they will make fresh demands, and detain him till their exactions are complied with. Assured of this, I deem it incumbent upon me to warn his highness before he runs headlong into the trap. The grand aim of the Spanish cabinet is to advance the Romish faith in England, and this they will be enabled to do, if the prince delivers himself into their hands."

"Ye are right, Sir Francis — ye are right,"

cried James. "I see it a' now. The step would be fatal, but, Heaven be praised, it is not yet ta'en! If the Spaniards ance get possession of ye, Babie Charlie, the Pope will be able to dictate his ain terms, and will make the restitution of his speeritual power and the restoration of the Romish faith the price of your release."

"This is idle, sire," remarked Charles. "I have too much faith in Spanish honour to doubt for a moment the treatment I shall experience from Philip IV. Spain is the most chivalrous country in Europe."

"But the most perfidious," cried the king. "I will not trust my bairn to traitors. I willna let you go."

"If you violate your promise, sire, you must take the consequences," rejoined Charles, sternly. "I swear to you I will never marry."

"But, my ain bairn —"

"I swear it," repeated Charles, emphatically.

"If your majesty breaks a promise thus solemnly made," said Buckingham, contemptuously, "no credit will in future be attached to aught you may assert. Your word is passed, and cannot be recalled."

"Hear me, Steenie — hear me, Babie Charlie! I implore you baith to listen to me!" cried the king.

"Nothing you can say will move me, sire," rejoined Buckingham, haughtily. "Such vacillation is unworthy of you. As to you, Cottington," he added, in a menacing tone, "you will repent your mischievous interference."

"Even if I should be unlucky enough to forfeit his highness's favour as well as yours, my lord, I shall never repent what I have done," replied Cottington. "As a faithful servant of the prince, I am bound to endeavour to deter him from a step which I feel may be fraught with fatal consequences. Having discharged my duty, I have nothing more to say. It is for his majesty to decide."

"Release me frae my promise, Babie Charlie! — release me, Steenie!" cried James, in almost piteous accents.

But both looked at him coldly and contemptuously, and neither made reply.

At this moment a head, covered with a fool's cap, surmounted by a coxcomb, was thrust from out the tapestry opposite the king, and a mocking voice exclaimed, "Ye seem perplexed, gossip. Will ye take a fool's advice?"

"What, hast thou been playing the spy upon us, Archie?" exclaimed the king, by no means displeased at the interruption. "Come forth instanter, sirrah!"

Thus exhorted, a fantastic little personage, clad in motley, holding a bauble, and having a droll, though somewhat malicious expression of countenance, stepped forth from his place of concealment. It was the court jester, Archie Armstrong.

"Hast thou been there all the time, knave?" demanded James.

"Ay, gossip," returned Archie, "and I have not lost a word of the discourse. I approve of Babie Charlie's visit to Spain, but he must take my cap with him, and if Philip allows him to come back, he may leave it as a parting gift to his majesty."

"Tell me what I shall do, Archie?" cried the king. "I am well-nigh at my wits' end."

"Then are you close to folly, gossip," returned Archie. "But since you ask me, I will tell you what you must *not* do. Break not your word, or you will never more be trusted."

"Right, fool," said Buckingham, approvingly.

"Balk not the prince your son's humour," pursued Archie, "or you will never have a daughter-in-law."

"Excellent counsel," said Charles. "Wisdom proceeds from the lips of fools."

"Make up your mind to what cannot be helped, gossip," said Archie to the king. "Babie Charlie and Steenie *will* go to Madrid, and there is no use

in saying them nay; you had best yield with a good grace."

James seemed to be of this opinion, for, after a brief pause, he exclaimed:

"Aweel, my bairns, I can hauld out nae longer. E'en gang your gait; and may gude come of the journey."

"Folly, you see, has carried the day," said Archie to Cottington.

Having thus regained their ground, the prince and Buckingham overwhelmed the old monarch with thanks, terming him the most indulgent of fathers and the best of kings. These demonstrations brought tears to James's eyes — tears of dotage, Buckingham thought them.

"Buss me, Babie Charlie, buss me," cried James, tenderly embracing his son. "Ah! ye little heed, my bonnie bairn, what pangs ye are about to inflict on your auld dad. But why not delay your departure for a few days? I hae mich to think of — my mind is sair distraught the noo — mich advice to gie you."

"There is far more danger in delay than in the journey itself," observed Charles, well knowing that a few hours might cause a change in his father's disposition. "We shall start at an early hour to-morrow morning. Meantime, with your gracious permission, we will send Cottington and Endymion

Porter to Dover, to hire a vessel to transport us to Boulogne."

"Weel, weel, it shall be sae," groaned James — "but what a tempting of Providence to trust the hope of the kingdom to a frail shallop! If ill betide, I shall have meikle to answer for."

"Cottington will provide us with a stout ship, and the wind will favour us, sire," said Charles, "so you need be under no apprehension for our safety."

"I see 'tis in vain to reason wi' ye," returned his father. "Gang to Dover as fast as ye can, Sir Francis," he added to Cottington, "and tak Endymion Porter wi' ye. Hire a good ship for the voyage."

"Set out with all despatch, I pray you, Cottington," said Charles. "You will obtain funds for the journey from my comptroller. Have all ready for our embarkation on Wednesday morning. We trust to be at Dover to-morrow night."

"All shall be ready for your highness," replied Cottington. "I now take leave of your majesty."

"Fare ye weel, my faithful Cottington," said James, giving him his hand to kiss. "Ye will hae a precious charge. I needna bid ye tak care of my bairns."

Cottington said nothing, but bowing profoundly to his majesty, quitted the cabinet with Endymion Porter.

Scarcely was he gone than James cried out hastily, "Stop them! — stop them! I hae something more to say."

"Impossible, sire," rejoined Buckingham, who justly dreaded lest the king should veer back to the old quarter. "If you have any further directions to give, we will attend to them. But let me pray your majesty to regard our project more cheerfully. You will have us back with the Infanta before Whitsuntide, and then I warrant me you will commend us for the exploit."

"Ye are more sanguine than I am, Steenie," groaned the king. "I never look to see either of ye again, and that makes me sae sad."

"Think of the bonnie princess, with her rich dowry, gossip," said Archie. "I guess you will be glad to see her. Think of your son-in-law, the Count Palatine, and how rejoiced he will be at the restitution of his dominions."

"I believe thou art in the plot against me, sirrah," said the king, cheering up a little. "And now, my bairns," he continued, "though ye winna let me send aught *afore* ye to Madrid, or procure ye a safe-conduct through France frae our ambassador, Sir Edward Herbert, I shall not fail to send *after* ye a' ye may need to grace ye at the court of Madrid, as braw apparel, jewels, horses, and the like. I dinna doubt but half my court will follow ye."

"Prithee, gossip, let me go with the prince's train," entreated Archie.

"Nay, I shall need thee to divert my melancholy," returned James.

"I shall add to your dulness, an you detain me, gossip," rejoined Archie. "All my mirth will vanish."

"Then have thy will, and gae," rejoined James. Then turning to his son and Buckingham, he added, "Be not afeared that ony tidings of your departure will reach France for some days, for on Wednesday I will stop all couriers, and lay an embargo on all vessels bound to ony French port. And now once more adieu, my bonnie bairns. Sair I am to lose you, but greeting will not mend the matter." So saying, he tenderly embraced them both, and bestowed his blessing upon them.

On quitting his father, Charles manifested considerable emotion, but Buckingham took leave of his royal master with apparent unconcern.

As Sir Richard Graham made a reverence to the king before following them, James said to him, "I hae a question to ask ye, Dick, and I require a straightforward answer. Are ye wholly unfettered, man — eh?"

"I do not exactly understand your majesty," returned the young man.

"Then ye are duller than I thought. Hae ye breathed vows to ony fair dame or damsel at our

court? Hae ye tied love-knots? Ye are of an amorous complexion, and like eneuch to hae a sweetheart. Hae ye ony engagement?"

"No, sire," replied Graham. "In that respect I am as free as air."

"Then tak my advice, man, and bring back a rich Spanish wife wi' ye," said James.

"I will endeavour to obey your majesty," replied Graham.

And with a fresh reverence he followed the prince and Buckingham out of the cabinet, leaving the king alone with Archie.

III.

How Tom and Jack set out on their Journey; and how they got to the Ferry near Tilbury Fort.

Later in the day, in pursuance of the plan arranged between him and the prince, Buckingham quitted York House, and, attended by Sir Richard Graham, repaired to New Hall, in Essex — a noble mansion, which he had purchased only two years previously from the Earl of Sussex, to whose brother it had been granted by Queen Elizabeth.

Situated between Chelmsford and Waltham Abbey, and surrounded by an extensive park, well stocked with deer, and boasting much fine timber, New-Hall had been a favourite hunting-seat of Henry VIII., who termed it, from the beauty of the site, Beaulieu.

It was a vast structure, consisting of two large quadrangles, and possessed, among other stately chambers, a grand banqueting-hall, nearly a hundred feet in length, and proportionately wide and lofty, in which bluff King Hal had often feasted on the venison killed in the park, and which was still adorned with his arms sculptured in stone. James I. delighted in New-Hall, and counselled his favourite to buy the mansion, probably providing the funds for the purchase, and here he often visited Buckingham, chasing the deer in the park, and carousing in the great hall.

While Buckingham proceeded to his country-seat, Charles started for Theobalds, where he remained till evening, when he rode with but slight attendance to New-Hall. On arriving at his destination he sent back his attendants, telling them he should remain in privacy with his lordship of Buckingham for two or three days, and giving one of them a letter to be conveyed next morning to the king. The singularity of this step excited some surprise among the prince's attendants, and they hazarded many guesses at the motive of this sudden visit to New-Hall. All these conjectures, however, were wide of the truth. Charles was very unceremoniously welcomed by Buckingham. They supped together in the great hall, but without state, and were only attended by Sir Richard Graham — the serving-men standing out of earshot — and

almost immediately after the meal, the marquis and his royal guest retired to rest. All needful preparations for the journey were entrusted to Graham, who delightedly undertook the task.

Long before daylight next morning, the two adventurous companions were called by Graham, who assisted the prince to attire himself in a riding-dress of far plainer stuff than he had ever worn before, and this office performed, the young knight went to render the same service to his patron, but found it needless, Buckingham being already fully equipped in a suit exactly resembling that of the prince.

A few minutes later, when Charles and his favourite met in a chamber where a collation had been laid overnight, they surveyed each other for a moment in silence, and then burst into laughter at the change wrought in their appearance, as well by their apparel as by the false beards with which they had disguised their features. Sir Richard Graham, who was standing by, shared in their merriment. He was similarly habited, and his riding-dress, which was of dark green cloth, with boots drawn up above the knee, became him extremely well, but he had not deemed it necessary to mask his handsome countenance as the others had done.

"Will it please your highness to taste this capon?" he said, as Charles sat down at table.

"Help me — but give me no title, Dick," re-

plied the prince. "Till I reach Madrid, I have laid aside my rank, and am now plain Jack Smith."

"And I am his brother Tom — forget not that, Dick," added Buckingham.

"Furthermore, thou art licensed to sit in our presence," pursued Charles. "During the journey we are equals."

Notwithstanding this gracious permission, Sir Richard hesitated to avail himself of it, but Buckingham enforcing the order, he took a seat, and all ceremony being now laid aside, he proceeded to lay in a good stock of the viands spread out before him.

"I would I had as good an appetite as thou hast, Dick," cried the prince, admiring his prowess. "I have vainly tried to get through this capon's wing, while thou hast made tremendous havoc with the pasty."

"I have not half done yet, your highness — I mean Master Jack Smith, pardon the involuntary slip of the tongue — the fact is, I have slept little, and find myself frightfully hungry."

"Then satisfy thyself, but use despatch, for we must away presently," remarked Buckingham. "Thou may'st eat both for my brother Jack and myself, for I have as sorry an appetite as he. Take a cup of sack, Jack, to the success of our expedition."

"With all my heart," replied Charles, filling a

goblet, while Graham followed their example. "The wine has done me good," pursued the prince. "Hast thou finished, thou insatiable glutton?"

"Another moment," responded Graham, hastily disposing of a slice of ham, and swallowing another cup of sack. "There, now I am quite ready. I will go fetch the valises, which are all carefully packed."

So saying he disappeared, but almost instantly returned with the baggage, while the prince and Buckingham, being already booted and spurred, took up their broad-leaved hats, cloaks, and horse-whips, and, moving as noiselessly as they could, proceeded to a private staircase which conducted them to a postern-door. This door being unlocked by Buckingham, the party found themselves in the garden, but marching quickly, under the guidance of Graham, they threaded a long yewtree alley, and soon reached an outlet into the park. On issuing forth, notwithstanding the obscurity, for it was not yet light, they could distinguish three mounted grooms, each of whom held a horse by the bridle.

Without a word, Charles vaulted into the saddle of the steed nearest him, Buckingham followed his example, while Graham, consigning the valises to the groom, was instantly on the back of the third horse.

Just as they started, a clock placed in an inner court of the hall struck five.

In another moment the trio, attended by the grooms, were galloping down a sweeping glade, skirted by lordly trees, then of course bereft of half their beauty, from want of foliage.

While they were thus speeding along, Buckingham remarked that the prince's looks were fixed on the heavens, and he asked what he was gazing at?

"At yon star," replied Charles. "'Tis hers!"

"It heralds you on to Madrid," said the marquis.

"Perchance it is shining upon her at this moment," cried Charles, with all a lover's rapture.

"Like enough, if her casement be open," rejoined Buckingham.

Charles did not hear the remark, but exclaimed, aloud:

"Mistress of my heart! life of my life! I am about to seek thee in a foreign land, and will not return till I can bring thee back with me."

Blissful visions rose before him, and he fell into a reverie, which lasted till they were out of the park.

A narrow lane brought them to the high road to Chelmsford. Pursuing this till they got within a short distance of the town, they struck into a by-road on the left, and, fording the Chelmer at Moulsham, shaped their course through a series of

lanes, passing by Badow, Sandon, and Hanning-field, until at last they mounted the hill on which Bellericay is perched.

Though still wanting an hour to sunrise, it had become sufficiently light to enable them, from the eminence they had gained, plainly to discern the broad river they designed to cross, and the Kentish hills on the opposite bank. Turning their gaze in this direction, they fancied they could even distinguish Gravesend. Before entering Bellericay they dismounted, and, consigning their horses to the grooms, dismissed the men, with strict injunctions of silence.

"An ye breathe a word of what has occurred, your tongues shall be cut out," said Buckingham; "but if ye are discreet, ye shall be well rewarded."

As the grooms rode off, Charles and Buckingham proceeded towards the Crown Inn, where post-horses were to be had, followed by Graham, carrying the baggage.

At the door of the hostel stood a waggon with a long team of horses, and several persons were collected around to witness the departure of the vehicle for London.

Seeing this, the prince and Buckingham halted, leaving Graham to go on and order the horses. As the young man approached the house, he was addressed by a sharp-looking little personage, who proved to be Master Ephraim Cogswell, the host.

"Good morrow, fair sir," said Cogswell, doffing his cap. "Are you going by the waggon? If so, you are just in time."

"No, friend," replied Graham. "Myself and my masters are not bound for London, but for Rochester, and we want post-horses to take us to Tilbury Fort, whence we propose to cross the Thames to Gravesend. We shall need a postboy to attend us, and carry the baggage."

"How many are ye, master? Ha! I see," he added, noticing Charles and Buckingham in the distance. And, after giving the necessary orders to an ostler, bidding him use despatch, he added, "May I make so bold as to ask how your masters are named, sir? They cannot be of this neighbourhood, for I remember them not, though I think I have seen your face before."

"Like enough," returned Graham. "It is not the first time I have been at Bellericay. My masters are the two Smiths."

At this moment the landlord was called by a passenger in the waggon, and shortly afterwards the vehicle was set in motion, and proceeded on its way. The host then returned to the charge.

"You said that your masters are named Smith, sir," he remarked to Graham. "Are they of this county?"

"You are inquisitive, mine host," returned Gra-

ham. "They are the brothers Smith, of Saffron Walden, and are tanners by trade. I am their man."

"They don't look much like tanners, friend," observed Cogswell, "nor you like a tanner's man. However, it's no business of mine. But here come the hackneys."

And, as he spoke, the horses were brought out of the stable, ready saddled and bridled. Seeing which, Charles and Buckingham came forward.

"No more tanners than I am a tanner," murmured Cogswell, eyeing them narrowly as they approached. "I will consent to have my own hide curried if they be not noblemen. Give your lordships good day," he added, bowing respectfully to them.

"Lordships! What means the fellow?" cried Buckingham. "Hast thou been jesting with him, Dick?" he added to Graham.

"Ay, that he has," returned Cogswell. "He avouched that your lordships bore the common name of Smith, and were nothing better than tanners. But that won't pass with me. Ephraim Cogswell can tell a nobleman when he sees him. And, but for your lordship's black beard, I would venture to affirm that I am standing in the presence of the Marquis of Buckingham himself."

"You are mistaken, friend," returned the mar-

quis, "and I counsel you not to repeat that pleasantry, as if it chance to reach the ears of my lord of Buckingham, he is likely to resent the liberty taken with his name."

"Nay, I meant no offence," replied Cogswell, bowing. "I know how to hold my tongue."

Somewhat annoyed by this occurrence, Charles and Buckingham mounted their horses and rode off, and were followed by Graham and a postboy, with the baggage.

Passing through the town, the party kept on the ridge of the hill for some distance, and then descended to Little Bursted. In less than an hour from quitting Bellericay, after crossing Langdon Hill, and passing over Horndon Hill, they reached Tilbury Fort, where quitting their horses, and paying the postboy, they instantly embarked on board the ferry-boat, and ordered the two men in charge of it to convey them with all despatch to Gravesend.

IV.

How Jack and Tom were taken for Highwaymen on Gad's Hill.

THE morning was clear but cold, and a strong north-easterly wind ruffled the water, and sent the ferry-boat quickly along. The passage across the river was not without interest to Jack and Tom. Wrapping their cloaks around them to screen them

from the blast, they amused themselves, in the first instance, by examining Tilbury Fort, which seemed to menace them with its guns. They next gazed admiringly down the wide and long reach called "the Hope," skirted on one side by the white cliffs of Kent, and on the other by the woody hills of Essex; then noted the appearance and manœuvres of some passing vessels; and lastly, as they neared Gravesend, turned their attention to the blockhouse, battery, and wharf, and commented upon the ships, some of considerable burden, lying off the port.

While his leaders were thus occupied, Graham, in order to pass the time, entered into conversation with the master ferryman, a weather-beaten old fellow named Randal Fowler, and praised the quickness of his boat.

"Ay, ay, she is a gallant little craft, sure enough," replied the ferryman. "She has done wonders in her day, and, moreover, has had some great folks aboard of her."

"Indeed, what great personages have you had the luck to carry?"

"Marry, the greatest was the Lord High Admiral," returned Randal.

"Nonsense, man, you don't mean to say that the Lord High Admiral has used your boat?" cried Graham, glancing at Buckingham.

"Yes I do, master," replied the ferryman, proudly.

"I don't recollect the circumstance, fellow," remarked Buckingham; "that is," he added, correcting himself, "I never heard that the Lord High Admiral had crossed the river by this ferry."

"It wasn't here, but in the Medway, that his lordship used my boat," rejoined Randal. "I took him and the Earl of Rutland to see the ships lying at Sheerness. I shan't forget it, for I got a piece of gold for the job. May I make so bold as to ask whither you are bound, masters?"

"For France," replied Buckingham, in a tone calculated to put an end to further inquiries.

But old Randal was not to be checked, and he was about to ask further questions, when Graham observed to him, in a low tone:

"Don't trouble the gentlemen further. They are going across the water to fight a duel."

"Can't they cut each other's throats, if they are so minded, in this country?" observed Randal. "It seems a waste of time and money to go so far on such an errand. However, that's no concern of mine."

With this he proceeded to let down the sail, calling to his man to look out, and in a few minutes more they were close to the landing-place. When Graham took out his purse to pay the fare, he could

find no silver within it, and his companions were unable to assist him. They had all plenty of gold, but no small change. Old Randal had only a few pence in his greasy leather pouch, and as to changing a jacobus, that was out of the question.

"Give him a couple of gold pieces," cried Buckingham. "We can't be detained a moment in landing."

As Graham obeyed the order, and placed the glittering coin in Randal's horny hands, the old ferryman exclaimed, in tones that bespoke his gratitude, "I heartily thank your honours. You are generous as princes — far more generous than the Lord High Admiral. This is the best fare I ever got, and if I could only earn as much every time I cross the Thames, I should soon be rich. Take an old man's advice, and make up your quarrel. You are goodly gentlemen both, and it would be a thousand pities if either of you were harmed."

"Hold thy peace, friend," said Graham, stopping him. "Thou hast got more than thy deserts. Be content."

"I am content — more than content," persisted Randal; "but I would fain prevent bloodshed. Beseech ye, good sirs, to listen to me."

But he spoke to deaf ears, for no sooner did the boat touch the strand than the prince and Buckingham leaped ashore, and ran up the steps, passing

as quickly as they could through the crowd of seafaring men and others collected on the wharf. They were speedily followed by Graham, charged with the baggage, for he resolutely refused the offer of Randal to carry it for him, not wishing to be troubled further with the old man. The party at once proceeded to the Falcon, where post-horses were kept.

As soon as his passengers were gone, old Randal took out the two jacobuses he had received, and, while feasting his eyes upon them, he thought it would be a lasting reproach to him if he allowed the duel to take place; and coming to the conclusion that the kindest and most Christian thing he could do was to have the gentlemen arrested, and bound over to keep the peace towards each other, he left his boat, and went to inform the portreve, as the chief officer of the town was designated, of the matter that had come to his knowledge.

The portreve, fully believing his story, at once despatched two officers to the Falcon to arrest the intending combatants, and bring them before him; but, on arriving at the post-house, the officers found that the persons of whom they were in quest had started full a quarter of an hour before. However, as the portreve's orders were peremptory, they ordered post-horses, and set off after the travellers,

and being well mounted, made sure of overtaking them before they could reach Rochester.

Meanwhile, the three companions, attended as before by a postboy carrying their baggage, had passed through the rich gardens surrounding the town, mounted the windmill-crowned heights, whence such an extensive and beautiful prospect is obtained, had ridden on through Chalk-street and past the thick woods of Maplesden, and did not slacken their pace till they reached the foot of Gad's Hill.

"Here we are at Gad's Hill — the scene of one of Falstaff's exploits," quoth Tom to Jack, as they were slowly ascending the eminence. "Hereabouts, the fat knight, with Bardolph and Peto, robbed the travellers of the gold they were conveying to the king's exchequer, and here the rogues, in their turn, were stripped of their booty and soundly belaboured by the madcap Prince Hal, and Poins. But even in our own day," added Tom, "Gad's Hill has an ill repute, and these thickets are still haunted by knights of the post and minions of the moon, who sally forth to bid the traveller stand and deliver, on peril of his life. Heaven grant we meet with no such caitiffs! Were they to ease us of the twenty-five thousand pounds we carry with us in bills of exchange on Paris and Madrid, besides our gold, they would obtain a rich spoil, and might hinder our journey."

"Prithee, not so loud, Tom," said Jack, glancing around suspiciously — "you may be overheard; and though I delight in adventures, I have no fancy for an encounter with highwaymen."

"Let us push on, then, Jack," rejoined Tom. "As I have just told you, this is a dangerous spot."

Putting their horses in motion, they soon reached the brow of the hill. Here, on the left of the road, stood a small hostel, called the Leather Bottle, and as Jack, who was charmed with the beauty of the scene, halted for a moment, the postboy found time to drain a horn of humming ale. Presently the travellers resumed their journey, and were descending the hill, which on this side, as on the other, was covered by wood, when they descried a large coach drawn by four horses coming towards them. Near this carriage, and apparently conversing with some one inside it, rode a richly-attired gentleman, attended by three or four mounted lacqueys.

"By Heaven! Jack, that is one of the royal carriages!" exclaimed Tom, calling on the other to halt. "And do you not perceive that the person who is riding beside it is no other than Sir Lewis Lewkner? Plague take him! What can he be doing here? This is the last place where one would expect to meet the master of the ceremonies."

"'Tis an unlucky chance that has brought him here," cried Jack. "He is certain to recognise us. We must turn back."

"No; let us put a bold front upon it, and dash rapidly past the coach. We shall escape notice," cried Tom.

"Impossible!" returned Jack. "It is the Comte de Tillières who is in the carriage. I caught a glimpse of his features just this moment."

"You are right," observed Tom. "It is the French ambassador. I saw him myself quite plainly. Look! he is now thrusting his head through the window."

"And see! they have stopped the carriage, and are consulting together," cried Jack. "They evidently take us for highwaymen, and are preparing to resist our attack."

"Shall we attack them, Jack?" said Tom, gaily. "To rob the French ambassador and the master of the ceremonies would be an exploit worthy of Prince Hal himself, and would be 'argument for a week, laughter for a month, and a good jest for ever.'"

"The matter is too serious for jesting," replied Jack, gravely. "Here comes Sir Lewis Lewkner. Shall we confront him, or beat a retreat?"

As he spoke, the master of the ceremonies rode towards them, with the evident intention of de-

manding their business. But they did not wait for his approach. Finding it impossible to avoid the encounter, which must have resulted in a discovery, Jack struck spurs into his horse, and leaping a low hedge on the right, plunged into the wood. Tom dashed after him, and Graham ordered the postboy to follow, but as the lad hesitated, he seized his horse, and, by a vigorous application of the whip, forced the animal to clear the hedge.

Just as this was accomplished, Sir Lewis Lewkner came up with the lacqueys, and called out, "Stand! if you are an honest man, and give an account of yourself!" Then, looking at the other more narrowly, he added, "Either my eyes deceive me, or it is Sir Richard Graham? But why this garb? Whom have you with you, Sir Richard?"

"Those are my friends, Jack and Tom Smith," roared Graham. And without another word, he jumped the hedge and disappeared in the thicket, leaving the master of the ceremonies completely bewildered. On recovering from his surprise, Sir Lewis returned to the coach, and told the ambassador what had occurred.

"A strange notion has come into my head," he added. "I feel confident that it was Sir Richard Graham whom I beheld, and I am almost equally

certain that the persons with him, whom he called Jack and Tom Smith, were no other than the Prince of Wales and the Marquis of Buckingham."

"You amaze me," cried the Comte de Tillières. "The prince and Buckingham! in disguise, travelling under feigned names, and without attendants! This is the road to Dover. Parbleu! can they be going to France?"

"That is highly improbable, your excellency," returned Sir Lewis, who began to feel that he had said too much.

Nothing more passed till they reached the summit of the hill, when they perceived two men galloping towards them. These were the officers, who halted as they came up, and one of them, respectfully saluting Sir Lewis, inquired whether three gentlemen had passed them on the road; adding, that he had an order from the portreve of Gravesend for their arrest, as they were about to cross over to France to fight a duel.

"Aha! this proves they could not be the persons I suspected," observed Sir Lewis to the ambassador who did not, however, appear entirely satisfied. "The gentlemen you are in pursuit of," added Lewkner to the officer, "avoided us, and took refuge in yonder wood. Possibly, they may have returned to the high road."

"Not a doubt of it," replied the officer.

"I should like to know the result of this adventure," observed the Comte de Tillières. "Go with these officers, Martin," he added to one of his mounted attendants, "and bring me word what happens. Thou wilt find me at Gravesend."

Adding a few words in a lower tone, he placed a purse in Martin's hands, and dismissed him.

As Martin galloped off with the officers, the coach was again put in motion, and the ambassador and Lewkner pursued their way towards Gravesend.

V.

How Jack and Tom were pursued by the Officers from Gravesend.

As had been conjectured, the travellers left the covert in which they had sought shelter and returned to the high road, speeding along it till they came to Strood Hill, from the summit of which they obtained a charming view of Rochester, with its ancient castle, its cathedral, and other picturesque structures, as well as of the adjacent town of Chatham, and the district watered by the winding Medway.

While they were pausing to examine this noble prospect, the postboy warned them that they were pursued, and pointed out the two officers and Mar-

tin, who were scouring along the valley about a mile off. At this sight the travellers immediately started again, and, dashing down the hill, speedily reached Strood. Next crossing the old wooden bridge at Rochester, and entering that fair city — then, as now, one of the most picturesque and beautiful in England — they rode along the High-street, till they reached Chatham.

Their horses were in such good condition, that it was evident they could hold out for another stage, so, quitting Chatham, they mounted another lovely hill, from the summit of which a delightful and extensive view greeted them, comprehending almost the whole of the meandering Medway, with Standgate Creek, Sheerness, the Nore, and the distant coast of Essex.

Nearer at hand the prospect was yet more enchanting, being composed of hill and dale, villages, churches, and homesteads, hop-grounds, apple-orchards, cherry-orchards, and all that can contribute to the embellishment of an English landscape. Of course, at this season of the year, when the hop-grounds lacked their garniture, when the orchards had no ripe produce, when the fields were bare of crops, and the woods leafless, the picture was deprived of much of its charm. Still, even with these disadvantages, it was *so* beautiful, that

Charles, as he gazed at it with a raptured eye, exclaimed:

"Drayton speaks truth when he says, in his 'Polyolbion,'"

O famous Kent!
What county hath this Isle that may compare with thee!

Fairer scene than this cannot be imagined. Yon broad and winding river, hastening on to mingle its waters with those of the Thames before they both are lost in the sea — those charming hills — those pompous woods — those ancient mansions — those reverend fabrics — those towns and hamlets — all bespeaking peace and plenteousness. Can any picture be more lovely?"

"None, none," replied Buckingham, who either felt or feigned a like enthusiasm. "It is only in England — perhaps only in this county — that such a prospect can be seen. We shall find nothing like it in Spain, you may depend, Jack. You must bring the Infanta to behold it."

"I shall not fail," replied Charles.

At this moment, Graham, who had been lingering behind, called out:

"Those rascally officers are coming quickly after us. They have not stopped at Rochester, as we expected, but have passed through Chatham, and are even now scaling this hill."

"Plague take the knaves!" cried Tom, im-

patiently. "Why should we concern ourselves about them?"

"They will cause us delay, and every hour — every minute — is of importance," returned Jack. "Let us on. We shall reach Sittingbourne before them, and it is not likely they will proceed beyond that place."

"On, then, to Sittingbourne," cried Tom.

And the whole party rapidly descended the hill.

At the foot of the eminence, on a common, where a road branched off to Maidstone, stood a large triangular gibbet, from which dangled the grisly skeletons of three robbers who once haunted the neighbouring thickets, and had been the terror of all travellers on that way. With a glance of disgust at these loathly objects, Jack and his companions rode on through Hambley woods, past Rainham, through the old town of Newington, on the farther side of which they mounted Keycall Hill, descending upon Key-street, after which they came in sight of Milton, an ancient town famous for its oysters, and once possessing a palace built by Alfred, but subsequently destroyed by Earl Godwin in the reign of Edward the Confessor.

Farther on, they passed the remains of Castle Rough, another fortress built by Alfred, and then entering Sittingbourne, rode at once to the Red Lion, and called for post-horses.

These were brought out with so much expedition, that the travellers were mounted and off full five minutes before their pursuers came up. Great disappointment was expressed by the latter on their arrival, and the officers would have relinquished the chase, but they were induced to go on by Martin, who paid for their post-horses, and promised to reward them liberally.

Jack and Tom were now three or four miles ahead, and had already passed Hempstead and Radfield, had cleared the little village of Green-street, and were making their way, at a rapid pace, along Watling-street (the ancient Roman road), by Norton Ash, Stone, and Raven Hill, towards Ospringe.

While mounting Ospringe Hill, on which a beacon then stood, they cast a look towards Feversham, Davington, and the marshy tract adjoining the Swale, bringing the Bay of Whitstable within their ken.

From Ospringe, about twenty minutes' hard riding brought them to Boughton Hill, from the summit of which they obtained a magnificent view over the woody district known as the Forest of Blean. From this point they first descried the lofty tower of Canterbury Cathedral rising above the woods.

In Blean Forest, which then extended for many

miles in the direction of the sea, the wild-boar was still hunted, and in times more remote bears had been found within its recesses. After a brief survey of this grand woodland prospect, they once more got into motion, and were soon buried amid dusky groves.

On emerging from the forest at Harbledown, they beheld the ancient city of Canterbury, with its ramparts, towers, gates, churches, and other edifices, overtopped by the noble cathedral, about a mile distant. This space being soon cleared, they crossed a bridge over a branch of the river Stour, and passing through the West-gate, a strong and stately structure flanked by two round towers, and defended by a portcullis, entered a long street bordered on either side by old and picturesque habitations.

VI.

How Jack and Tom were visited by Master Launcelot Stodmarsh, Mayor of Canterbury.

It was now not far from noon, and the travellers, having ridden upwards of fifty miles, began to feel that they stood in need of some rest and refreshment. Accordingly, they alighted at an inn bearing as its sign a grotesque portrait of King James, which made both Jack and Tom smile as they regarded it, and, being shown into a chamber by the obsequious

host, Christopher Chislet, inquired what eatables he had in the house.

"I can give your honours some rare trout from Fordwich," returned Chislet. "Our Fordwich trout are accounted the finest in England, and such as come not even to the king's table, Heaven bless him! Then you can have a famous shield of brawn, a quarter of a kid, and a chine of beef; and, while you are discussing these, I will prepare you a dish of wild-fowl, or plovers — our plovers are dainty birds, and more toothsome than snipe or woodcock."

"The trout, the chine, and the plovers will suffice," said Tom. "And now, what wines hast thou in thy cellar?"

"Good store, and of the best, an please your honour," responded Chislet. "I have Rhenish and Gascoigne, white wine of Gaillac, and red wine of Bordeaux. Or shall I brew you a pottle of sack, or bring you a flagon of our old Kentish ale? The ale is wondrous strong and bright. I warrant you shall taste the hops in it."

"I will take thy word for it, mine host," returned Tom; "but we care not for ale, however strong and well hopped. Give us a flask or two of Gaillac, if it be good, and brew a pottle of sack."

"Your honour shall be well contented," said the host.

While the repast was being prepared, Jack and Tom strolled forth to view the cathedral. Being familiar with its internal beauties, they contented themselves with a survey of the exterior, and returned just at the moment that the Fordwich trout were placed upon the table by the host. The repast was thoroughly enjoyed by the travellers, whose long ride had wonderfully sharpened their appetites.

"I never fared better than I have done to-day," observed Jack. "But we must not loiter; so call for the reckoning, Dick, and order the post-horses."

On this, Graham arose and was about to summon the host, when the latter suddenly entered, and, with a look of consternation depicted on his features, cried out:

"His worship the mayor, Master Launcelot Stodmarsh, desires to speak with you, gentlemen."

At the words, a large portly-looking man, with a very red face, strutted into the room. The mayor was followed by two functionaries bearing halberds, who placed themselves one on either side of the door, and was accompanied by Martin and the two officers from Gravesend.

On the entrance of the mayor, Jack and Tom thought it necessary to rise and salute him, and they did so with so much dignity, that the wor-

shipful gentleman began to feel that he was in the presence of persons of importance.

"To what cause are we to attribute the honour of this visit, Mr. Mayor?" demanded Tom. "We are strangers here, and have merely halted in your city on our way to Dover."

"That I understand," replied Stodmarsh, essaying to look dignified in his turn. "But you must excuse me, gentlemen, if I say that I cannot permit your departure till you have given a satisfactory account of yourselves."

"On what plea do you venture to detain us, sir?" inquired Jack, in an authoritative tone, and with a sternness that took the mayor completely aback.

As soon as he had recovered himself, he said, with some respect,

"These officers have a warrant for your arrest from the portreve of Gravesend, Master Nicholas Holbeach. It is understood that you are about to cross over to France for an unlawful purpose — to fight a duel — a mortal duel — and it is our business to prevent it."

"Tut! tut! this is idle, sir," cried Tom. "The portreve has been wholly misinformed. We have no such design. We are peaceable travellers, as you may perceive by our deportment. This is my

brother, Jack Smith, and I am not likely to fight him."

"I must have proof of that assertion, sir," rejoined the mayor, "as well as of your pacific intentions, before I can allow you to proceed on your journey. Have you no document about you to prove the correctness of your statement?"

"If I had any such document, I should decline to produce it," replied Tom, haughtily.

"Then you cannot blame me if I doubt your explanation," rejoined the mayor. "These officers must take you back to Gravesend, to be dealt with as my brother magistrate, the portreve, shall deem meet."

"Hold! Mr. Mayor," cried Tom, imperiously. "Listen to me, before you commit yourself —"

"I commit myself!" exclaimed Stodmarsh, greatly offended. "I can allow no such improper language to be used to me. I look upon you as suspicious characters, and authorise your immediate arrest. Do your duty, officers."

As the men were about to advance, Graham placed himself before them, and said, "Mr. Mayor, allow me to give you a word of advice."

"Advice, sir — advice!" cried the mayor, swelling with indignation. "I would have you to know that Launcelot Stodmarsh never takes advice."

"So I should imagine, sir," replied Graham,

coolly. "Nevertheless, let me beg, before anything is done which you may have cause to regret, that you will grant us a word in private."

"The request is extremely irregular, sir," rejoined Stodmarsh, calming down. "But I shall not refuse it. If you have any explanation to give, I am ready to hear it."

And he motioned the landlord and the others to withdraw, telling his own officers to guard the door outside.

The order was obeyed by all except Martin, who contrived to slip behind a piece of furniture without being perceived.

"And now, sirs," said Stodmarsh, taking a seat, but allowing the others to remain standing, "what have you to impart to me?"

"Mr. Mayor," said Graham, approaching him, and assuming a tone and manner that could not be mistaken, and that quite confounded the person he addressed, "it is necessary that you should be made aware that you are in the presence of two of the most important persons in the kingdom — his Highness the Prince of Wales and the Lord Marquis of Buckingham."

Thunderstruck by the information, the mayor sprang to his feet, upsetting the chair on which he had been sitting, but perceiving that he still looked incredulous, the prince and Buckingham removed

their false beards; whereupon, unable to doubt longer, Stodmarsh threw himself at the feet of Charles, and said, "Pardon, your highness, pardon! I ought to have recognised you and the noble marquis even when disguised."

"There is nothing to forgive, Mr. Mayor," replied Charles, raising him graciously. "It is no reproach to you that you did not recognise us. I owe you an explanation, and you shall have it. All I require from you, on your loyalty to the king my august father, is, that you keep secret what may be disclosed to you."

"Your highness may entirely rely on my discretion," rejoined Stodmarsh.

"The fact is, Mr. Mayor, since you must know the truth," interposed Buckingham, "that in my capacity of Lord High Admiral, I am proceeding to Dover to examine into the condition and discipline of the fleet in the narrow seas, and his highness the prince has deigned to accompany me in the visit. Secresy being essential to the plan, we are only attended by my equerry, Sir Richard Graham, and are travelling by post, as you perceive. Now you know all. Send back those officers who have come on a fool's errand from Gravesend, and facilitate our departure. Do this, and we shall be perfectly content."

"It shall be done instanter, my gracious lord," replied Stodmarsh, hastening towards the door.

"Hold a moment, while we put on our beards," said Buckingham, as he and the prince resumed their disguises.

This done, the mayor opened the door, and called out, "Ho, there! ho! landlord, I say! Bring out horses without delay for these gentlemen. They have perfectly satisfied me. You constables from Gravesend," he added to the two officers, "can return as you came. Tell the portreve he has been misinformed. Post-horses forthwith for Dover, I say, landlord."

"And the reckoning, let us have that, mine host," added Graham.

As soon as the room was cleared, Martin came out of his hiding-place.

"A pretty discovery I have made," he mentally ejaculated. "The prince and Buckingham! Who would have thought it? This shall to my master."

And, taking out his tablets, he traced a few lines, tore out the leaf, and folded it up.

He then went forth, and found the travellers mounting their horses. Jack was bidding adieu to the mayor, who was respectfully holding his stirrup, much to the host's astonishment. In another moment

the party rode out of the courtyard, followed by a postboy with the baggage.

As soon as they were gone, the host observed to the mayor, "Will your worship acquaint me with the names of my guests?"

"Not now — not now, Master Chislet," replied Stodmarsh, mysteriously. "I am not at liberty to speak, but this I may say to you, your house has been highly honoured — most highly honoured."

"I judged as much," returned the host.

Meanwhile, Martin had taken aside one of the officers from Gravesend, and giving him the note he had prepared, desired him to deliver it on his return to the French ambassador.

"His excellency will reward you liberally — most liberally," he added; "but here is an earnest," slipping a piece of gold into the constable's hands. "Tell him I am going to Dover, and will report further."

With this he ordered a post-horse, and rode after the travellers.

VII.

How Jack and Tom were lodged for the Night in Dover Castle.

NOTHING particular happened to Jack and Tom till they reached Barham Downs, when they left the road to examine a Roman camp, and while

Tom was scrambling down the outer fosse of the earthwork, his horse slipped and threw him. Tom rose next moment without assistance, and none the worse for the fall, but the horse had sprained his shoulder, and could only limp along. Owing to this accident, the progress of the party became necessarily slow, and before they regained the highway, they observed another traveller speeding along in the direction of Dover. They shouted out to him to stop, but though he evidently heard the call, as he looked towards them, he paid no heed to the summons, but rather appeared to accelerate his pace.

"That is one of the men who followed us from Gad's Hill," observed Graham. "I saw him in the court-yard of the inn when we left Canterbury. Why is he riding so fast to Dover? Can he have obtained any information of our project? Shall I ride after him?"

"To what end?" rejoined Jack. "Even if you could overtake him, which is unlikely, you could not stay him. But I feel no sort of uneasiness. It is impossible he can have made any discovery."

"I hope not," returned Graham; "but it looks like it."

The prince now quitted his companions for a short time, and took a solitary gallop over the downs, pausing ever and anon to look around.

Little did he dream that some two years later, on the wild waste over which he was careering, a tent would be pitched, wherein his bride *(not* the bride of whom he was in quest, but Henrietta Maria of France) would first receive her court ladies.

After tracking a long valley, hemmed in on either side by lofty chalk ridges, between which ran the little river Dour, the travellers at last came in sight of Dover, with its proud castle crowning the hill on the left.

At this juncture they perceived two horsemen riding towards them, who proved to be Sir Francis Cottington and Endymion Porter.

"Heaven save your highness, and you, my good lord," said Cottington, as he came up with Endymion Porter. "You have made good speed. We thought to meet you on Barham Downs."

"We lamed a horse, or we should have been here an hour ago," returned Charles. "But pray be covered, gentlemen. No ceremony now. Remember that I am only to be addressed as Master Jack Smith, and that this," pointing to Buckingham, "is my brother Tom. But let us hear what you have done."

"I have carried out all the instructions given me," replied Cottington. "I have hired a swift-sailing schooner, the *Fair Maid of Kent*, which, if I

be not deceived in her, will convey you speedily to Boulogne; but though she is ready to sail at once, I advise you to delay your departure for a few hours. A strong wind is blowing, and there is a rough sea, but the captain of the schooner, Master Pynchen, feels sure the weather will improve, and he counsels us to wait till morning."

Though he was all impatience to cross, Charles assented to the delay.

On entering the town, the prince and his companions proceeded to an inn, where chambers had been engaged. He did not, however, remain long in-doors, but repaired with his attendants to the harbour, in order to look at the little vessel destined to convey him to the opposite shores. As Cottington had stated, it was blowing hard, and there was evidently a strong sea outside, but the *Fair Maid of Kent* was lying snugly within the port, and her appearance perfectly satisfied both Jack and Tom as to her sea-going qualifications.

While they were examining the little vessel, and debating whether they should go on board her, a party of mounted carabiniers issued from a side-street, and rode towards them across the wharf. At the head of this troop was an officer, whom the prince and his companions immediately recognised as Sir Harry Mainwaring, lieutenant of Dover Castle. They also noted that with Sir Harry was the person who

had followed them from Gad's Hill to Canterbury, and had passed them on Barham Downs.

On nearing the party, Sir Harry Mainwaring, a stout, handsome man of military deportment, with a grey beard and moustaches, contrasting strongly with his bronzed visage, ordered his men to halt, and then dismounting, left his steed in charge of an equerry. Before advancing towards the party, he ordered two of the troopers to keep off all bystanders, and having seen this done, he marched towards Charles and Buckingham, saluted them, and was about to speak, when Buckingham interposed.

"Sir Harry Mainwaring," said the marquis, "it would be useless in the prince and myself to attempt disguise with you, but it is his highness's desire, and, indeed, command, that you do not allow any look or action to betray your knowledge of his person."

"I obey," replied the lieutenant, "but I fear that his highness's incognito, and your own, my lord, cannot be preserved, since you are both known to the emissary of the French ambassador, who has ridden on to apprise me of your visit. He has contrived to distance you by an hour."

"How came the man to penetrate our secret?" demanded Charles, bending his brow.

"He was present, though unobserved, during your interview with the Mayor of Canterbury;"

replied Mainwaring. "On the man's arrival at Dover, he rode up at once to the castle, and gave information to me. I did not entirely credit his statement, but immediately came down to satisfy myself, and I now find he spoke truth. Still, I can scarcely believe that the motive he assigned for your visit is correct."

"I know not what he has told you, Sir Harry," returned Charles, "but you shall learn the exact truth. I am proceeding to Madrid, attended by the Marquis of Buckingham and these three gentlemen."

"How? to Madrid with only these attendants!" exclaimed Mainwaring, astounded. "Your highness will forgive me if I cannot repress my astonishment."

"It is even as I have said, Sir Harry," rejoined Charles. "I am going to Madrid on a special errand — nay, there shall be no mystery with you — I am going to fetch the Infanta. I desire to preserve the strictest incognito, and it is of the last importance that no message be sent over to France, as I would not be known during my journey through that kingdom. To-night I purpose to remain at Dover, and I shall sail for Boulogne at an early hour to-morrow, in yon little schooner. I count upon your aid, good Sir Harry."

"I am sorry your highness has confided the

project to me," returned Mainwaring, with some hesitation. "I fear it is inconsistent with my duty to allow your departure from the kingdom. Indeed, I dare not permit it."

"'Sdeath! sir, is this language to hold to your prince?" cried Buckingham, in a fury. "You will stay us at your peril, sir. You forget that I am Constable of Dover Castle, and that you are my subordinate officer."

"No, I do not forget it, my lord," replied Mainwaring, respectfully. "I am ready to obey all your lawful commands. But I have a duty to perform to my sovereign and the state, which is paramount to all other considerations. I will despatch a messenger to Whitehall to ascertain his majesty's pleasure, but, till the man's return, I dare not permit his highness's departure."

"Is it not enough that the prince has vouchsafed to inform you of his intentions?" demanded Buckingham.

"No, my lord," replied Mainwaring, firmly. "For aught I know, the prince may be leaving without his royal father's sanction — nay, contrary to his injunctions."

"By Heaven, this passes all endurance!" cried Buckingham. "But it is idle to reason with one so obstinate and dull-witted. We will go in spite of you."

"No vessel shall quit this harbour till I have the king's warrant for its departure. I will take thus much upon myself, be the consequences what they may," rejoined Mainwaring, in a determined tone.

"Nay, Sir Harry is in the right," observed Charles. "You shall not need to send to Whitehall for my royal father's warrant, sir," he added to the lieutenant. "I have it with me, and will show it you."

"Enough," replied Mainwaring. "With that assurance I am perfectly content, and am ready to obey your behests. Will it please your highness, and you, my good lord, together with those with you, to lodge within the castle to-night? You will be accommodated more suitably than at an inn, and will be secure from all chance of further interruption."

To this proposition Charles readily agreed, whereupon Sir Harry besought him to mount his steed and ride to the castle; but the prince declined the offer, preferring to proceed thither on foot. Mainwaring then despatched a couple of troopers to the inn for the travellers' baggage, and calling his equerry to him, bade him take back Martin to the castle.

"I will give further orders concerning him when I arrive there," added the lieutenant, "but, mean-

time, do not allow him to hold communication with any one. These gentlemen," he added, "will be my guests for the night. See that lodgings are prepared for them in the Constable's Tower and in Peverell's Tower."

The equerry bowed, and, in obedience to the order he had received, rode off with the troop, taking Martin with him, who thus found himself a prisoner.

Shortly afterwards, Charles and all those with him quitted the quay, and took the road leading to the Castle Hill.

Arrived at the foot of the eminence, they commenced the ascent by tracking a zig-zag path, which conducted them to a steep flight of steps, and scaling these, they found themselves within a short distance of the outer gate of the fortress.

At this point, the grand old pile, aptly enough described by Matthew Paris as "the key and lock of the realm," reared itself majestically before them; its hoary walls studded with watch-towers girding the entire circumference of the hill, while its massive keep rose proudly amidst them. Charles had visited the fortress on one or two previous occasions, when he had been received with all the honours due to his exalted rank; when the royal banner had floated above the donjon-tower; when trumpets had sounded and drums had been beaten to herald his

approach; when the whole garrison was drawn up in the outer court, and the road lined with the inhabitants of Dover; but never at such times had he gazed at the ancient fabric, replete with so many historical recollections, with feelings deep as those that impressed him now. Sentinels in steel cap and corslet, with pike on shoulder, were pacing to and fro on the ramparts; other men-at-arms were stationed on the watch-towers and near the gate, but these were the only inmates of the stronghold he beheld. The castle wore its ordinary aspect, and, thus beheld, gained infinitely in grandeur and majesty.

From the castle, Charles turned to look at the town and harbour, and was well pleased to find that the works undertaken by his royal father for the improvement of the pier, which, though strongly built by Henry VIII., had become ruinous through neglect, were making good progress.

Could he have foreseen the stupendous bulwark which an after age was destined to produce; could he have anticipated that the rude and unserviceable pier then constructing would be supplanted, some two hundred and forty years later, by a granite wall projecting far into the sea, and capable of withstanding the utmost fury of the waves; he might have blushed at the insignificance and almost inutility of the work then going on. But, possessing no such

foresight, he was well enough content, and deemed it an important achievement.

Rousing himself from the reverie into which he had fallen, he proceeded, with Mainwaring and Buckingham, who were standing near him, towards the gateway of the castle. Little aware of the importance of the personages who were entering the fortress, the guard stationed at the gate contented themselves with saluting the lieutenant, and bestowed a mere glance of curiosity at the others. Still, there was something in the look and deportment of the prince and Buckingham that excited the curiosity of these men.

The party had now entered the outer ballium, and as it was still light enough for an inspection of the fortress, Charles strolled for some time about the courts, examining the various towers on the walls — pausing before the old Roman pharos and the time-hallowed church, supposed to have been founded by King Lucius — after which he directed his course to the keep.

Entering it, and leaving Buckingham and the others in the state apartments on the third story, Charles, accompanied only by Mainwaring, mounted to the summit of a lofty turret, whence an extraordinarily fine view was commanded. It was now growing dusk, but even thus imperfectly beheld, the prospect was very striking. Across the Channel, the

grey outline of the coast of France was distinguishable; the position of Calais being fixed by its lighthouse, while another pharos gleamed from Cape Grisnez, near Boulogne. Immediately below was the town, revealed by its twinkling lights, and the harbour with its shipping. Charles tried to make out the *Fair Maid of Kent*, but could not succeed in distinguishing her.

Undisturbed by the whistling wind, Charles remained for nearly a quarter of an hour on this lofty place of observation. He then descended with the lieutenant, and on repairing to the chamber where the others had been left, they were informed by an attendant that the evening repast was served. At this welcome intelligence, the whole party adjourned to the Constable's Tower, in a lower chamber of which a substantial repast was laid out. In compliance with the prince's injunctions, no ceremony whatever was observed during the meal. The whole party sat down together, and the conversation was carried on without restraint. Shortly after supper, Charles and Buckingham, who were somewhat fatigued by their lengthened journey, withdrew to the chambers allotted them, and both slept soundly till they were roused, an hour at least before it was light, by wakeful Graham. The rest of the party were already up, and prepared for departure, and as soon as the prince and Buckingham had partaken

of a hasty breakfast, they quitted the castle under the escort of the lieutenant, and followed by four stalwart troopers carrying the baggage.

As they descended the Castle Hill on the way to the harbour, Mainwaring informed Charles that late at night, long after his highness had retired to rest, a messenger had brought a despatch from the king, ordering him to prohibit the departure of all vessels bound for the coast of France. "This order," he added, "I shall carry out as soon as your highness is safely off."

Captain Pynchen was anxiously awaiting his passengers, the wind being now fair, and promising a quick passage. The embarkation was speedily accomplished. Mainwaring saw the prince and Buckingham safely on board, and then wishing them a prosperous voyage, took his leave.

As the *Fair Maid of Kent* weighed anchor, and spread her sails to the favouring breeze, which promised soon to waft her and her precious freight to the shores of France, the morning gun was fired from Dover Castle.

VIII.

How Jack and Tom crossed the Channel, and rode post from Boulogne to Paris.

For some time Charles remained standing on the deck of the schooner, with his gaze fixed upon the

shores from which he was rapidly receding. After running his eye along the line of lofty and precipitous chalk cliffs, extending on the right to the South Foreland, and on the left to Sandwich, he turned his regards to the old castle, nowhere beheld to such advantage as from the sea. Precisely at that moment the first beams of the sun began to gild the lofty keep, and ere long the grey walls encircling the hill, with the numerous watch-towers, the antique church, and the pharos, were lit up, until the entire fortress, which had hitherte looked cold and stern, assumed a bright and smiling aspect, which Charles was willing to construe into a favourable omen to his expedition. Not till castle and cliffs began to grow dim in the distance, did he bid a mental adieu to England.

No incident worthy of being chronicled occurred during the passage. When in mid-channel, those in the schooner caught sight of several men-of-war belonging to the fleet which Buckingham had professed he was about to inspect, but in other respects the voyage was monotonous, and appeared long and tedious to the travellers, all of whom were impatient to get across the Channel. We must not omit to mention that, immediately after their embarkation, Jack and Tom, deeming disguise no longer necessary, had laid aside their false beards.

Just at the hour of two in the afternoon they

entered the harbour of Boulogne, and, after some little delay, were permitted by the officers of the port to disembark, and Charles, for the first time, set foot in France.

Cottington having concluded all arrangements with Captain Pynchen before landing, Jack and Tom underwent no detention on that score, but, followed by a couple of sailors carrying their baggage, proceeded to the Ecu d'Or, in the Grande Rue, where they were welcomed by a very civil landlord, who told them they were too late for the table d'hôte, but considerately added that he could speedily set an excellent dinner before them. This was agreed to, but the dinner was not served so promptly as promised, and being copious, took some time to discuss, consequently it was hard upon four o'clock before the travellers were in the saddle. Attended by two gaily-dressed postilions, wearing enormous jack-boots, and who made the quay echo with the clangour of their horns, they rode out of Boulogne, and, crossing a wooden bridge over the Liane, took the road to Montreuil, where they proposed to pass the night, and where they arrived, without accident or interruption, about seven o'clock, and took up their quarters at the Tête de Bœuf, renowned for its pâtés de becassines.

Rising betimes next morning, they were all on horseback soon after seven, and on the way to

Amiens, which they determined to make the limit of that day's journey.

All the party were in high spirits. To Charles the novelty of travelling in a foreign land was exciting, and though the country through which he rode was uninteresting in a picturesque point of view, in his present frame of mind it became invested with charms such as many a really beautiful landscape had not revealed to him. Fortunately the weather was fine, and the state of the roads good, so that the travellers got on without annoyance.

A joyous company they were — as joyous and light-hearted as any that had preceded them on the same route. Whether it was change of clime and scene, or the excitement they had previously undergone, that occasioned this gaiety, none cared to inquire, being perfectly satisfied with the result. Even Sir Francis Cottington, who had been so strongly averse to the expedition, yielded to the enlivening influences, and began to view the project with a hopeful eye.

Though maintaining his habitual gravity of look, Charles at heart was as gleeful as his companions. Never had he been more entirely free from the melancholy which usually o'ershadowed him — never was the present more void of gloom — never did the future look brighter. Sometimes, in order to

indulge in a fit of pleasant musing — to dwell upon the charms of his mistress — to conjure up the idea of their first interview, and his transports on beholding her — he would ride apart from the others — but he soon returned to join in their lively chat.

In this manner they advanced on their journey, scarcely aware how much they had accomplished. After skirting the forest of Crecy, close to which the famous battle was won by Edward III., the thought of which roused the warlike spirit of Charles, and made him burn for the military renown of the Black Prince, they descended into the vale of the Somme, and traversed it till they reached Abbeville.

Here they alighted at the Hôtel de la Poste, situated near the Cathedral of St. Wolfram. At the doorway of the inn several travellers were congregated, who naturally regarded the new comers with curiosity, and speculated upon their quality. There was nothing, as we know, in the attire of any of the party to indicate their rank, and yet those who beheld them could not fail to be struck by the stately looks and deportment of Charles and Buckingham.

It chanced that among the observers on the occasion there were two gentlemen from St. Valery, who had lately been in England, and they both

recognised the illustrious travellers — though almost doubting the evidence of their eyes. All the party had gone into the house with the exception of Graham, who stayed behind to pay the postilion, when one of these gentlemen, M. Marcellin, making a very polite bow, thus addressed the young equerry:

"Pray excuse me, monsieur, but I and my friend M. de Nouvion have recently been in England, and during our stay visited your famous race-course at Newmarket. While there, we had the singular satisfaction of beholding his Highness the Prince of Wales and the Lord Marquis of Buckingham. We saw them, monsieur — or perhaps I ought to say milord — sufficiently long to enable us to study their features carefully, and fix them upon our memory. You will not be surprised then, monsieur, when we declare that in two of your party, who have just gone in with the landlord, we conceive that we recognise Prince Charles and the lord marquis."

"I take what you say as a great compliment to my friends, messieurs," returned Graham, without the slightest embarrassment; "but you are mistaken. The gentlemen to whom you refer are very humble individuals — two brothers, the Messieurs Smith. They certainly bear some resemblance to the illustrious personages you have mentioned — enough, perhaps, to deceive a stranger."

"The resemblance is too striking in both instances to admit of doubt upon the point," observed M. de Nouvion. "Of course it is not for us to make a remark if the Prince of Wales and the lord marquis choose to travel incognito."

"I will speedily convince you of your error, messieurs," interrupted Graham. And stepping within the doorway, he shouted, "Hola! Jack and Tom. Come hither for a moment, I pray of you."

At this summons, Jack and Tom immediately came out of the salle à manger into which they had been ushered by the host, and Jack said, as if addressing an equal, "What do you want with us, Dick?"

"These gentlemen will have it that you are the Prince of Wales and my Lord of Buckingham," replied Graham. "Pray undeceive them, for they will not credit my denial."

"You do us too much honour, messieurs — far too much," observed Jack. "It is not, however, the first time that my brother Tom and myself have been taken for the important personages in question."

"I should think not," said M. Marcellin.

"The resemblance is rather unlucky for us," remarked Tom. "It has more than once got us into difficulties."

"I can easily imagine it," rejoined De Nouvion, sceptically. "It must be unpleasant also for the

prince and the lord marquis to be mistaken, as they might be accidentally, for you and your brother M. Jack Smith. Of course you have seen my lord of Buckingham, monsieur?" he added.

"Oh yes, I have seen him," returned Tom. "We have seen both him and the prince, eh, Jack?"

"Frequently," returned Jack.

"Then you may possibly have remarked, as I did," returned M. de Nouvion, "that the marquis wears a ring on the first finger of the right hand — precisely such a ring as yours, M. Tom Smith — while the prince has a brooch, the counterpart of which fastens the cloak of your brother Jack?"

"Confound the rascal! how closely he must have observed us," whispered Tom to Jack. "Eh bien, messieurs," he added to the others, "if you persist in your belief, there is no more to be said. It would be unreasonable in my brother Jack and myself to be angry with you for so flattering an error, and, though neither of us is likely to become a marquis or a prince of the blood, we must accept the titles for the moment, since you are determined to invest us with them."

So saying, he bowed, as did Jack, and both, laughing heartily, returned to the salle à manger, followed by Graham, and leaving M. de Nouvion and his friend in some perplexity.

It soon became apparent, from the extraordinary deference paid to Jack and Tom, that Messieurs de Nouvion and Marcellin had communicated their opinion as to the real rank of his guests to the hôtelier. With a thousand apologies, the host besought his distinguished guests to remove to a private room; but this they declined, saying they did not desire better accommodation than ordinary travellers.

"You are extremely obliging, my good host," remarked Tom, "but we know the cause of your civility, and it is proper we should set you right. Two gentlemen, with whom we have just been conversing, are under the delusion that we are grand seigneurs travelling incognito. The notion is absurd. We have not the slightest pretension to high rank, and are simply what we seem."

"That is quite possible, milord," replied the hôtelier, bowing, "because to me you seem to be princes."

"'Sdeath! take us for what you will," cried Tom. "All we ask is, not to be charged like princes. Put nothing down for rank in your reckoning."

The host declared he would not, but failed to keep his word. The best the house could produce was set before his guests; but they had to pay handsomely for their entertainment. Their indifference to the heavy charge which he had not scrupled to

make, confirmed the shrewd host in his opinion of their rank. On the departure of the travellers, the whole house assembled in the courtyard to see them mount, and bows and curtseys were made them on all sides, which they very graciously returned.

At Amiens, where they arrived before dusk, they put up at the Hôtel de France, and visited the cathedral during the solemnisation of evening mass — Charles being lost in admiration of the extraordinary architectural beauty of the interior of this noble Gothic pile.

Next morning they started at an early hour for Paris, and did not loiter on their journey. With no little satisfaction they found themselves at Saint Denis, where they changed horses for the last time. A short stage brought them to the faubourgs of Paris, and they entered the city by the Porte Saint Denis — not the existing triumphal arch, but an older portal, built by Charles IX.

On passing through the gateway, Charles experienced that emotion which every stranger must feel on first beholding a city of which he has heard much and longed to visit. All was new to him — habitations, people, costumes — and he gazed around with insatiable curiosity. His course led him through the Rue Saint Denis, and its old and picturesque houses delighted him, but it was on reaching the quays on the banks of the Seine, and while crossing

the Pont-Neuf, that Paris was displayed to him in all its marvellous beauty. Notre-Dame, the Châtelet, the Louvre, the Tuileries, and a multitude of less important structures, then burst upon his gaze, filling him with admiration. But he had no time to dwell on the picture. Passing the Collége de Quatre Nations, and along the Quai des Théatins, the party soon reached the Rue de Bourbon, and alighted at the Hôtel des Etrangers.

IX.

How Jack and Tom were graciously received by the Duc de Montbazon.

In the course of the evening Graham brought word that some brilliant fêtes were just then taking place at court, whereupon Jack expressed a strong desire to be present at one of them on the following day. Tom declared he saw no difficulty in the matter, and undertook to obtain admission to the Louvre. However, as they were unprovided with fitting attire, a messenger was at once despatched to M. Marolles, the court tailor, who presently repaired to the hotel, and received an order for three magnificent suits. Marolles not only undertook to furnish these habiliments at an early hour on the morrow, but to provide the three gentlemen with all else they might require to make a befitting appearance at the royal fête. Moreover, he pro-

mised to bring M. Gaston, the court perruquier, with a good choice of periwigs à la mode de la cour. This important matter arranged, Jack and Tom retired to recruit themselves after the fatigues of the day, and prepare for the festivities of the morrow.

When they arose next morning, they found Marolles and Gaston in attendance. Their dresses became them to admiration — at least, Marolles declared so — and Gaston was quite satisfied with the sit of their perukes — the latter, it may be mentioned in passing, had been ordered in some degree to disguise their features.

At a later hour in the morning, arrayed in their splendid habiliments, and wearing their flowing perukes, Jack and Tom, attended by Graham, who was equally richly attired, drove in a coach to the Louvre, and were set down in the great court.

On entering the palace, their distinguished appearance satisfied the ushers that they were persons of importance, and they were at once admitted to the cabinet of the Duc de Montbazon, grand chamberlain to the queen, by whom the royal fêtes were superintended. The duke, who was a very formal personage, received them with ceremonious politeness. They were presented to him as the Messieurs Smith, three Englishmen who were passing through Paris to Madrid, and they noticed

that the duke smiled slightly when this announcement was made.

"We are quite aware, M. le Duc," said Tom, "that we ought to have been presented to you by our ambassador, but as time presses, and we have only a single day in Paris, we have ventured to come direct to you, being inflamed with a most ardent desire to witness the royal fête, which we are told is to be given this evening."

"I will do all in my power to oblige you, messieurs," returned Montbazon, in the most gracious manner possible. "To-day, as you may possibly be aware, a grand banquet is given by the queen-mother, Marie de Médicis, to his majesty and the principal persons of the court. The banquet will be followed by a superb allegorical ballet, which will take place in the grand salle de danse; and in this ballet, besides the fairest of the court dames, the Princess Henriette Marie and my gracious mistress, our lovely young queen, will dance."

"It is chiefly to behold your young queen, Anne of Austria, of whose beauty we have heard such ravishing descriptions, that we desire to witness this ballet, M. le Duc," remarked Jack.

"I need scarcely tell you, messieurs," said Montbazon, "that, as conductor of the royal fêtes, I have been compelled to refuse a vast number of applications from members — some of them distinguished

members — of the court to be present at this ballet, but I am disposed to make an exception in your favour. As strangers, the king will feel that you have a greater claim upon his hospitality than his own subjects possess. In his majesty's name, therefore, I invite you, messieurs, to the banquet, and to the ballet."

"You overwhelm us with obligation, M. le Duc," replied Jack. "Gratified as we are by the invitation, we can scarcely accept it, as we feel that you are straining courtesy too far."

"Nay, do not stand on ceremony, messieurs," replied Montbazon. "I should be very sorry that you missed these fêtes, and as your stay in Paris is limited to a single day, you cannot have another opportunity. I myself will see you well placed."

"We have no rank to entitle us to any but the lowest place," observed Tom. "Indeed, we ought not to sit down among the court nobility."

A singular smile played upon the duke's countenance, and he said, with some significance, "Be assured I will assign you proper places, messieurs."

Just then an usher entered, and informed the grand chamberlain that the English ambassador was without, and craved an audience.

"This is lucky!" exclaimed Montbazon. "It will spare you the necessity of waiting upon Sir Edward Herbert."

"One word, M. le Duc," said Jack. "I must pray you not to admit him."

"Not admit him!" cried the duke, feigning surprise. "Wherefore not?"

"You shall know as soon as we are alone," rejoined the other.

"Entreat his excellency to excuse me for a moment," said Montbazon to the usher. "I shall soon be disengaged."

"It is right, M. le Duc," said Charles, as soon as they were alone, "that you should know who we are; but in making the disclosure, I must throw myself upon your generosity to keep the matter secret."

"It is perfectly safe in my hands, prince," replied Montbazon, rising and bowing profoundly. "I knew you and my lord of Buckingham the moment you entered. Marolles informed me you had sent for him, and I was, therefore, prepared for this visit. You look surprised, but I received information of your arrival in Paris last night from the lieutenant-general of police, to whom it was communicated."

"Is the king aware of my arrival?" inquired Charles.

"Not as yet," replied the duke. "I intended to apprise him, but if it is really your highness's desire to pass through Paris without a public en-

pearance at court, I will not mention the matter to his majesty till after your departure."

"You will do me an immense favour, for which I shall ever feel grateful, M. le Duc," rejoined Charles. "If presented to his majesty, I must tarry here for some days, and I am bound on an expedition of the utmost urgency——"

"To Spain," remarked Montbazon, with a smile. "I understand. Your highness may rest easy, I will not thwart your project, but will facilitate your departure. Your ambassador is in the antechamber, and will be sure to see you as you go out. Let me beg of you, therefore, to pass forth this way."

So saying, he opened a side-door communicating with a private staircase, through which Charles and his companions, with a renewed expression of their gratitude, made an exit.

X.

How Jack and Tom drove about Paris, and what they saw during the Drive.

DETERMINED to make the most of their time, Charles and his companions spent several hours in driving about Paris, noting every object of interest that came under their observation, — palaces, hotels of the nobility, ancient habitations, theatres, churches, fortresses, prisons, hospitals, colleges, bridges,

and public edifices of all kinds. They tracked the Rue Saint Honoré and the Rue Saint Antoine from end to end, visited a multitude of churches and convents by the way, strolled about the Place Royale, and spent some time in contemplating the Bastille. Surrounded by a deep moat, approached only by a drawbridge, bristling with ordnance, and flanked by towers, this terrible state prison and fortress seemed almost a counterpart of the Tower of London, though it wanted the majesty of the latter structure.

"'Tis a stern and sullen pile, the Bastille," observed Charles, "and the heart aches when one thinks of the multitude of captives confined within it."

"Louis XIII. would say the same thing of the Tower, if he chanced to behold it," rejoined Buckingham.

"Possibly he might," remarked Charles, gloomily. "And yet the Tower never affected me so profoundly."

"And no doubt his most Christian Majesty makes light of the Bastille," said Buckingham, "and thinks it the finest building in his fair city of Paris, as it certainly is the most useful. Where else could he safely lodge so many state offenders, and prevent them from uttering a complaint? Would to Heaven it were as easy for our dear

dad and gossip to send a traitor to the Tower as it is for Louis to incarcerate one in the Bastille! The lettre de cachet is an admirable invention. No accusation — no trial — secret arrest and secret imprisonment. With the lettre de cachet and the Bastille, a monarch or his minister may play the despot with impunity. The time may come when your highness may enjoy the truly regal privilege of the lettre de cachet."

"Any attempt to exercise such arbitrary power in England would cause a revolution," observed Charles. "But you ever jest with the most serious subjects, Tom. Let us leave this moody pile. The sight of it makes me melancholy."

"Whither shall we go?" cried Buckingham. "Yonder is the Porte Saint Antoine. Suppose we pass through it, and drive outside the walls to the Porte Saint Martin? Your highness will then have seen all Paris."

"Not quite all, Tom," returned Charles, "but enough to convince me that it is a wondrously beautiful city, far more picturesque than London, and yet, I own, I like London best."

"'Twould be strange if you did not," remarked Buckingham. "But we must embellish London, and make it surpass Paris in beauty."

"London, in my opinion, needs no embellishment," said Graham. "The Thames is a far finer

river than the Seine; London Bridge is handsomer than the Pont Neuf; Whitehall is a nobler palace than the Louvre; Saint Paul's surpasses Notre-Dame in grandeur; and we are all agreed that the Tower is infinitely more majestic than the Bastille."

"You are right, Dick," observed Charles. "And yet, as a whole, Paris is a finer city than London."

"I am loth to admit so much," said Graham. "But your highness is a better judge than I am, and I must needs defer to your opinion. Unquestionably, the habitations here are loftier than with us."

"And more picturesque," said Charles. "We have no street like the Rue Saint Antoine, which we have just traversed."

"None so long, I own," rejoined Graham. "But give me the Strand, or Fleet-street."

"What say you to the Samaritaine on the Pont Neuf?" demanded Buckingham.

"A mere mechanical toy," replied Graham; "quaint and pretty enough, but Saint Dunstan's clock is better worth seeing."

"Have you no admiration for the Tuileries?" said Buckingham.

"The palace is not entirely to my taste," returned Graham. "I like Saint James's better."

"You are as void of taste as you are obstinate, Dick," observed Charles, laughing. "But whatever

I may think of the beauties of this city — and manifold they are — rest assured I would not exchange London for it."

While this conversation took place, they passed through the Porte Saint Antoine, and pursuing a broad road laid out on the top of the counterscarp, skirted the old walls until they came to the Porte Saint Martin, when they again entered the city, and drove direct to their hotel in the Rue de Bourbon.

While the prince and his companions were thus employing their time, Sir Francis Cottington and Endymion Porter were fully occupied in preparations for the journey to be undertaken next day. Their first business was to despatch a courier to King James, with a letter apprising his majesty of the safe arrival of the prince and Buckingham in Paris. This done, they proceeded to a banker in the Rue des Lombards, where they obtained gold for some of the bills of exchange with which they were furnished; and being thus amply provided with funds, as well for the journey as for immediate requirement, they procured, in pursuance of the orders they had received, two handsome riding-suits for the prince and Buckingham. Moreover, having suffered grievously from the neglect of due provision in this respect during their ride from Boulogne to Paris, they purchased well-padded saddles for the

whole party, and took care that the holsters were furnished with pistols. Pistols also were provided for the belt, and musquetoons for the shoulder, so that henceforth the travellers would be armed to the teeth, and able, it was thought, to resist any attack by robbers that might be made on them during the journey.

"You have made due provision for our comfort as well as for our security, gentlemen," observed Charles, as he examined these articles, which were laid out for his inspection. "I am particularly glad to see these easy saddles. We could scarce have got to Madrid without them."

"And these laced riding-habits, broad-leaved grey hats, and funnel-topped boots will transform us into French cavaliers in a trice," cried Buckingham. "We have only to don these habiliments, and wear our moustaches en croc, and the metamorphosis will be complete."

"These riding-dresses are the counterpart of those worn by his majesty Louis XIII. while hunting, my good lord," replied Cottington.

"They are handsome enough for any monarch in Christendom," cried Buckingham. "But, thus attired, we shall be compelled to change our designation. We can be Smiths no longer."

"That must not be," returned Charles. "As

John Smith I have started on the expedition, and John Smith I will continue till I reach Madrid."

"And I of course shall remain brother Tom," said Buckingham. "After all, one English name is as good as another in France, and it signifies little what we are called."

At this juncture, a servant entered to say that a messenger from the Duc de Montbazon was without, and shortly afterwards a well-dressed personage was shown into the room. He announced himself as M. Chevilly, confidential valet to the duke, and thus declared his mission:

"Highness," he said, making a profound obeisance to the prince, "I have been sent by the Duc de Montbazon to attend upon you, and upon the noble marquis, if you will deign to employ me. My master deeply regrets that he is unable personally to attend upon your highness, but he has given me ample instructions. He has charged me to say that he will send his own carriage to convey you to the Luxembourg, where the banquet given by her majesty the queen-mother takes place. If permitted, I shall have the supreme honour of attending your highness to the palace, and after the banquet will conduct you to the Louvre, where you will witness the grand ballet."

"The duke is, indeed, most considerate," said

Charles. "I fear I may put him to some inconvenience."

"My master is anxious to anticipate your wishes," returned Chevilly. "If I understand aright, your highness designs to start at an early hour to-morrow morning for Spain. May I venture to ask whether any of your gentlemen have taken the trouble to order post-horses?"

"Not as yet," returned Cottington. "We await his highness's orders. But there can be no difficulty about the matter."

"Pardon me, monseigneur," said Chevilly. "There is great difficulty, as you would have found, had you made application. Without my master's intervention you would have had no post-horses."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Buckingham. "That would have been awkward. But why should we be refused?"

"Because the lieutenant-general of police had interdicted your departure till his majesty's pleasure respecting you should be ascertained, my lord," rejoined Chevilly. "My master, however, has made it his business to remove the obstacle, and, I rejoice to say, has succeeded. Here is an order for the horses, countersigned by the head of the police," he added, delivering it to Cottington. "You can start at any hour you deem proper."

"Another great obligation I am under to the duke," observed Charles.

"A mere trifle," said Chevilly. "In an hour the carriage will be here to convey you to the Luxembourg. I will await your highness's further orders without."

And with a profound bow he withdrew.

Shortly afterwards, Charles, with Buckingham and Graham, retired to their respective chambers, and proceeded to make their toilettes with great care.

XI.

How Jack and Tom dined at the Luxembourg; and how they were presented to Queen Marie de Medicis.

PUNCTUALLY at the time appointed, the magnificent equipage belonging to the Duc de Montbazon entered the court-yard of the hotel, and Charles with Buckingham and Graham, being ceremoniously conducted to it by Chevilly, were driven to the Luxembourg. Chevilly went with them, posted on the marche-pied.

The palace of the Luxembourg — still one of the chief ornaments of the French capital — was at this time in all its freshness and splendour, having only been completed a few years previously by Marie de Médicis, who spent an enormous sum upon its construction, and in its internal embellishment.

Modelled upon the Palazzo Pitti at Florence, it possessed charming gardens laid out in the Italian style, and ornamented with marble fountains and statues.

On arriving at the palace, the carriage containing Charles and his companions passed through the gateway into the grand court, which was filled at the time with splendid equipages. On alighting, our travellers entered a spacious vestibule, thronged with gentlemen ushers, pages, valets, and musketeers of the royal guard. Here they were met by Chevilly, who preceded them up a noble staircase, and led them along a magnificent corridor, adorned with antique statues and paintings by the first Italian masters.

Eventually, the party were ushered into a large and gorgeously furnished room, in which were assembled the guests. The company, as may be supposed, consisted of the élite of the French nobility, and they were all as much distinguished by aristocratic deportment and refinement of manner as by splendour of apparel.

Montbazon had taken care to make it known that three Englishmen had been invited to the banquet, and when Charles and his companions made their appearance, it was at once understood they must be the persons referred to by the duke. But who were they? This was a question that no one

could answer, and Montbazon not being present at the moment, the general curiosity remained unsatisfied. That they were persons of high rank none doubted, but no one — not even the ushers — had heard their titles.

Meanwhile, Charles and his companions, not unconscious of the curiosity they excited, and secretly amused by it, had halted, and remained standing at some little distance from the rest of the company. The remarkable dignity of the prince's deportment, and the noble character of his features, drew all eyes towards him, while Buckingham's stately figure and haughty manner made him also a mark for general observation. There were some fair observers, however, who thought Sir Richard Graham the handsomest of the three.

Charles seemed perfectly indifferent to the effect which he produced upon the assemblage, and though he did not assume any air of superiority, it was impossible that he could disguise his habitual majesty of deportment. Buckingham, accustomed to outshine all the members of his own court by the splendour of his apparel and the magnificence of his ornaments, was mortified to find himself eclipsed by several of the nobles on the present occasion, and lamented the want of his diamond girdle and ropes of pearls. He looked around proudly, as was his wont at White-

hall, and offended some of the high-spirited young nobles by his supercilious air.

His haughty glance was still ranging over the courtly throng, when large folding-doors at the upper end of the room were thrown open, and a gentleman usher, attended by a number of pages dressed in white satin, announced their majesties the king and queen.

Preceded by the Duc de Montbazon, bearing his wand of office, and walking backwards, the young monarch then came forth, leading the queen-mother by the hand. Louis XIII. was of slight figure, but well proportioned, with handsome features and fine eyes. His pourpoint and mantle were of crimson damask, embroidered with gold and enriched with precious stones, and round his neck he wore a chain with the order of the Toison d'Or. His majesty seemed out of health. He walked feebly, and his countenance bore traces of suffering.

Marie de Médicis, who still retained much of her beauty, had set off her noble person to the utmost advantage. The stomacher of her dark satin dress blazed with diamonds and rubies. A carcanet of pearls encircled her still snowy throat, and wreaths of pearls adorned her tresses, which had lost none of their raven hue. Her eyes were lustrous, her brow smooth as marble, and her carriage majestic and imperious.

On the appearance of the royal party, the company immediately drew aside to allow them passage, and profound reverences were made on all sides. These were very graciously acknowledged by the queen-mother, and somewhat coldly by her royal son, who scarcely deigned to look around.

Charles and his companions escaped the king's notice, but not that of Marie de Médicis, who appeared much struck by their appearance, and vouchsafed them a gracious smile. Little did Louis XIII. deem that within a few paces of him stood the heir to the throne of a kingdom powerful as his own — a prince with whom he was destined to be allied — or he might have bestowed something more than a heedless glance upon him.

However, though both were objects of interest to him, it was neither with the king nor the queen-mother that Charles was now occupied. His attention was engrossed by the lovely young queen who followed them. Anne of Austria was then about twenty-four, and consequently in the full éclat of her beauty. Her figure was exquisite, and her movements combined Castilian dignity with Andalusian grace. In stature she was somewhat below the ordinary female standard, but this circumstance detracted nothing from the effect she produced. Her feet and hands were the smallest and most beautiful imaginable, and her waist taper, yet admirably

rounded. Her features, lovely in expression as in form, were lighted up by large dark eyes beaming with mingled fire and tenderness. Her nose was small, and, judged by classic rule, might have been termed too flat, but it was charming nevertheless, as was her little mouth, the under lip of which protruded beyond its roseate partner, proclaiming her a true daughter of the house of Austria. Her rich brown locks were wreathed with diamonds, and gathered in crisp little curls, as was then the mode, upon her white open brow. Her dress was of yellow damask, the body being covered with twisted fringes of diamonds and precious stones. In her right hand she carried a Spanish fan, and her left hand was accorded to Cardinal Richelieu, who had the honour of conducting her to the banquet.

The wondrous beauty of the young queen transcended any ideas that Charles and Buckingham had formed of it, and the latter was perfectly dazzled, her charms kindling an instantaneous flame in his breast.

On her part, Anne of Austria had remarked both Buckingham and the prince, and she was not unconscious of the ardent glance of admiration which the former had dared to fix upon her. But for this glance, which called the blood to her cheek, she might have drawn Richelieu's attention to the strangers, and inquired their names.

"How lovely the queen is," whispered Charles to his favourite.

"She is perfection," rejoined Buckingham; "and if the Infanta Maria is only equally lovely, as I doubt not she must be, your highness will be the happiest of men."

"Fair as the queen is, they say Louis is insensible to her charms, and neglects her for Madame de Chevreuse," remarked Charles. "Looking on her, I cannot believe the scandal."

"If she be so neglected," rejoined Buckingham, breathing hard, "his majesty merits the fate of a careless husband. But see! who comes next? One need not be told that it is the Princess Henriette Marie. Her beauty pales beside that of Anne of Austria."

"Hum! I am not sure of that," rejoined Charles. "They are different in style, but both are beautiful."

The fair young princess, who was now led past them by the Duc de Guise, was not yet fifteen, and consequently her personal charms could not be fully developed. But there was the promise of extraordinary beauty about her; and her magnificent black eyes, luxuriant black tresses, dark glowing cheeks, coral lips, and pearly teeth, showed what her charms would be when arrived at maturity. Henriette Marie inherited all her mother's beauty,

and, indeed, was so like her mother, that, at Florence, she might have passed for a daughter of the house of Médicis.

As the princess moved gracefully along under the conduct, as we have said, of the Duc de Guise, her eyes encountered those of Charles, which were fixed upon her. There was nothing to alarm her, as there had been in Buckingham's bold gaze at the queen, but there was something in the look that vibrated to her heart, and awakened an emotion such as she had never previously experienced. A kind of fascination was exercised over her, and she could not withdraw her gaze from the dark handsome countenance that enthralled it. A strange presentiment crossed her, and seemed to announce that her future fate was in some way connected with the person she beheld.

"That gentleman must be a stranger," she remarked, in a low voice, to the Duc de Guise. "I do not remember to have seen him before."

"I know not who he is," replied the duke, regarding Charles with surprise. "But I will inquire anon, and inform you."

Charles's eyes followed the princess as she glided gracefully along, and it would almost seem that she felt their influence, for she turned her head slightly, and bestowed a second glance upon him.

"A merveille!" exclaimed Buckingham. "You

have evidently created an interest in the bosom of the fair Henriette Marie, and if a corresponding impression has been produced upon your highness, we had better stay where we are, instead of prosecuting our journey to Madrid."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Charles. "The princess is very beautiful, I admit — very captivating — but I cannot swerve from my allegiance to the Infanta. I begin to think we have run great hazard of discovery in attending this banquet. Many inquiring looks have been fixed upon us."

"Amongst others, those of the princess," replied Buckingham. "She has evidently been trying to ascertain who your highness may be, but I hope she will not learn the truth till we have left Paris, or there will be considerable risk of our detention. If she is as clever as she is beautiful, she will not let such a prize escape her. Heaven grant she display not too much interest in you to the Duc de Montbazon, or he may counter-order the post-horses."

"We were unwise to come here," observed Charles, gravely.

"That I feel," replied Buckingham. "Having lost my heart to the lovely queen, I shall be tormented evermore with a hopeless passion. But being here, we must go through with it. Retreat is now impossible."

Meanwhile the guests marched on. Next after

the Princess Henriette Marie came her younger brother, Gaston de France, Duc d'Orléans, conducting Mademoiselle de Montpensier, whom he subsequently espoused.

Monsieur, as the Duc d'Orléans was styled, was presumptive heir to the throne, the king being as yet without issue by his union with Anne of Austria. Of an ambitious nature, and indisposed to wait the due course of events, Gaston was ever conspiring against his royal brother, but his designs were invariably baffled by the vigilance of Richelieu, who surrounded him with spies, and received intelligence of all his machinations.

The Duc d'Orléans was a prince of very noble presence, and looked more robust than the king, though his features were not so handsome as those of Louis XIII. He was his mother's favourite son, and as she would gladly have seen him on the throne, she secretly supported his schemes, and by so doing excited the suspicion of Richelieu and the king. Into these intrigues, however, we need not enter, as they have no relation to our story. On the present occasion Gaston was splendidly attired, and made a very magnificent appearance. Aware that he secretly aspired to the throne, Charles and Buckingham regarded him with curiosity; but they sought in vain to read his character in his looks. He was a profound dissembler, and his visage was a

mask to hide his thoughts. The Duc d'Orléans and Mademoiselle de Montpensier were succeeded by a long train, comprising, as we have said, the most distinguished personages of the court, but it was not till the whole of these had passed by that Charles and his companions fell into the line. A host of pages and valets, amongst whom came Chevilly, brought up the rear.

"This flagrant violation of etiquette in your highness's case would drive Sir John Finett distracted, if he were to hear of it. And the Duc de Montbazon must be equally annoyed," remarked Graham to the prince.

"It gives me not the slightest concern," rejoined Charles. "In reality, there is no violation of etiquette whatever, since I am only known as Jack Smith."

Passing through an ante-room lined with attendants in rich liveries, the guests were ushered into the banqueting-hall — a noble apartment, with a ceiling painted with frescoes, and walls hung with tapestry, not of sombre hue and design, but light and pleasing to the eye, representing pastoral scenes and flowers. A flourish of trumpets was sounded as the royal party entered the banqueting-chamber.

At the upper end of the table there was a dais, at which the queen-mother sat beneath a canopy of state, with the royal party on either side of her.

These august personages were served only by nobles, who esteemed it a proud distinction to be so employed.

In all respects the banquet was regal. The plate was superb, the meats of the choicest kind, the wines varied and exquisite. Officers were stationed at short intervals, and numberless attendants did their duty most efficiently. Though placed among the inferior guests, and at the lower end of the board, Charles and his companions were well satisfied with their position, inasmuch as they were free from observation themselves, and had a full view of the royal party at the upper table.

Buckingham ate little, though tempted by many delicacies, but feasted his eyes on the charms of the queen, and Charles's gaze took the same direction, though, sooth to say, he looked quite as much at the Princess Henriette Marie as at Anne of Austria. Graham was by no means indifferent to the splendour of the scene, and looked frequently towards the dais, but he did not allow his curiosity to interfere with his enjoyment of the dainties set before him.

Our three travellers sat together, with the prince in the midst, and their haughty reserve and taciturnity effectually isolated them from their neighbours, who regarded them with the dislike which Englishmen at all times have contrived to inspire among their Gallic neighbours. They were sedulously

attended upon by Chevilly, who stood behind them during the repast.

Though splendid and profuse, the banquet did not occupy much more than an hour. It was terminated by a marshal, who proclaimed in a loud voice from the dais that her majesty the queen-mother drank to her guests, whereupon all the company arose and bowed towards the upper table in acknowledgment of the honour done them. After this, the royal party retired — the ceremonies observed at their departure being similar to those which had marked their entrance. The guests followed in the same order as before, and returned to the grand saloon.

On entering this room, Charles and Buckingham looked in vain for Anne of Austria and the young princess. They had already set out for the Louvre to prepare for the ballet, and the king and the rest of the royal party speedily followed them.

Marie de Médicis, however, felt constrained to stay with her guests, and it was at this juncture that the Duc de Montbazon, who had not hitherto found an opportunity of addressing the prince and his companions, approached them, and stated, with a significant smile, that her majesty the queen-mother had commanded him to present them to her.

"Her majesty has remarked your presence, prince," he added, in a low voice, "and has made

particular inquiries about your highness and my Lord of Buckingham. I told her you were the Messieurs Smith, but she would not be satisfied with that description — neither would the queen nor the Princess Henriette Marie. So I was compelled to avow the truth to them, and disclose your real rank."

"How, M. le Duc?" exclaimed Charles, with a look of displeasure. "You promised to preserve my secret."

"It is perfectly safe with these royal ladies, prince," rejoined Montbazon. "In fact, no option was left me. Had I not confessed, discovery must infallibly have ensued. Now you are safe. It is not strange that you have escaped the king's notice, for his majesty rarely troubles himself about strangers, but it is lucky that Cardinal Richelieu did not remark you."

"Under these circumstances, M. le Duc, will it be prudent to proceed to the Louvre?" said Charles.

"I see no danger whatever, your highness," returned Montbazon; "and I may be permitted to add, that the queen and the Princess Henriette Marie will be greatly disappointed if you are not present at the ballet. I told them of the ardent desire you had evinced to behold it."

"It would be inconsistent with your highness's chivalrous character to retire now," observed Buckingham.

"After what the Duc de Montbazon has just said, I should never dream of retiring," rejoined Charles.

"I am delighted to hear it," said Montbazon. "Chevilly shall place masks in the carriage, and you can wear them in the ball-room, so there will be small chance of discovery. But now allow me to conduct you to her majesty."

Marie de Médicis was seated on a fauteuil, surrounded by a number of lords and ladies, but as Montbazon approached, she motioned her entourage to withdraw, and most graciously received the prince and his companions on their presentation.

"I was little aware whom I had the honour of entertaining, prince," she observed to Charles; "but I need not say how much indebted I am to the Duc de Montbazon for enabling me to exercise some slight hospitality towards your highness and the Marquis of Buckingham. I am sorry your stay in Paris is so short, but I presume there is more attraction in Madrid, whither I understand you are going."

"I have found Paris so charming, that I greatly regret leaving it, madame," replied Charles. "And my regrets will not be diminished by the glimpse I have been permitted to enjoy of your brilliant court."

"It is your own fault, prince, that you are re-

stricted to a mere glimpse," rejoined Marie de Médicis. "Can I not offer you sufficient temptation to remain here? — if but for a week. Will you not delay your journey to Madrid for that time?"

"Impossible, madame," replied Charles. "Feeling I can place confidence in your majesty, I will at once own that secresy and despatch are indispensable to the success of the expedition I have undertaken. I ought not to be here this evening, but I could not resist the desire to behold your court, and the Duc de Montbazon kindly consented to gratify me."

"Montbazon did well," rejoined Marie de Médicis. "Since you are resolved to go, prince, I shall not press you further. Doubtless you are engaged on some romantic enterprise," she added, with a smile; "and I would not, on any account, interfere with it. You are said to be the most chivalrous prince in Europe, and the hazardous journey you have undertaken proves you deserve the title. What shall I say of you, my Lord of Buckingham, except that you are a worthy companion of the prince?"

"I am afraid your majesty will look upon us as two crazy knight-errants," rejoined Buckingham. "Since I have had the honour to be your guest, I have been so enchanted with what I have seen, that I begin to view our expedition in a different light,

and should not be sorry if you could induce his highness to forego it."

"I fear the attempt would be fruitless," said Marie de Médicis; "but perhaps the prince may change his mind before the end of the evening. I am now going to the Louvre, and shall expect to see you there at the ballet. Au revoir."

On this, Charles and his companions retired, and the queen-mother arising, with a gracious salutation to those around her quitted the apartment, attended by her ladies of honour and by the Duc de Montbazon, and entered her carriage.

Her guests followed her example, and in less than an hour the whole of the company were transferred from the palace of the Luxembourg to that of the Louvre.

XII.

How Jack and Tom witnessed a grand Ballet at the Louvre; and how Tom danced a Saraband with Anne of Austria, and Jack danced the Pavane with the Princess Henriette Marie.

ACCUSTOMED as they were to pomp and splendour, and familiar with every possible display of regal magnificence, it was not without admiration almost amounting to wonder that Charles and his companions passed through the gorgeous halls of the Louvre, now brilliantly illuminated, and filled with richly-attired guests.

On this occasion the superb suite of apartments, surpassing in size and splendour those of any other palace, were thrown open, and at no time had a more numerous or a more distinguished assemblage been collected within them. All that the court of France, then the most elegant and refined as well as the most aristocratic in Europe, could boast in the way of nobility and high birth, was present. The chief beauties and the most accomplished gallants belonging to a court maintained by a young king and lovely queen were at the Louvre that night, and Charles and Buckingham were free to admit that they had never seen so many charming dames and noble-looking cavaliers as were now met together. Something of this effect might be owing to the gorgeous dresses, and Buckingham more than ever regretted the want of his own splendid habiliments and diamonds.

Moving on with the glittering stream, Charles and his companions passed through many gorgeous rooms, until they reached a noble hall called the "Salle Neuve de la Reine." At the doors of this grand saloon, in which the ballet was about to take place, numerous gentlemen ushers and pages were stationed, and before entering it the prince and his companions put on their masks.

Anne of Austria, like most of her countrywomen, was passionately fond of dancing, and excelled in

the art, and the king, though caring little for the amusement, was willing to gratify her tastes. Balls and masquerades, therefore, were of frequent occurrence at the Louvre, greatly to the delight of the younger members of the court.

The Salle Neuve de la Reine, in which these entertainments usually took place, was a spacious and lofty apartment, admirably adapted to the purpose, as it allowed ample space for the movements of a vast number of couples. The panels were covered with sky-blue satin, and the numerous mirrors were festooned with flowers. At one side there was an orchestra, filled by the best musicians from the Grand Opera. Viewed from the doors by which the company entered, this splendid saloon presented the most charming coup d'œil imaginable. The atmosphere was loaded with perfumes, which almost intoxicated the senses. At the upper end of the room was a canopy, beneath which, on raised fauteuils, sat Marie de Médicis, Anne of Austria, and the Princess Henriette Marie, surrounded by a bevy of court dames, but neither the king nor Monsieur, nor any other grand seigneur, except the Duc de Montbazon, stood near them.

Just as Charles and his companions entered the saloon, the grand allegorical ballet was about to commence. A lively prelude was played by the orchestra, and, at its close, the side-doors communi-

cating with another apartment flew open, and a band of Olympian divinities, attended by minstrels clashing cymbals, and playing on the lyre and the lute, swept into the hall, and taking up a position in its centre, proceeded to execute a classic dance. Personated by some of the loveliest dames and damsels of the court, and robed in gauzy drapery that displayed their symmetry of limb to perfection these goddesses ravished the hearts of the beholders, and Juno, Pallas, and Venus looked *so* lovely, that Buckingham declared he should be as much puzzled as Paris himself if called upon to decide which was the fairest.

Besides the principal dancers, there was a numerous corps de ballet, composed of nymphs, shepherds, and fauns, and this troop mingled with the dance at intervals, and heightened its effect. The grace and beauty of the performers in the ballet would have sufficed to ensure its success; but it was admirably contrived, and presented a series of exquisite classical pictures. The group with which the dance closed was charmingly conceived, and formed so enchanting a picture, that the spectators were transported with delight, and could scarcely repress their enthusiasm. As it was, a murmur of admiration pervaded the assemblage.

When this charming picture was broken up, Juno, accompanied by the two other goddesses,

stepped towards the seats occupied by Marie de Médicis and Anne of Austria, and bending before their majesties, thus addressed them:

Je ne suis plus cette Junon
Pleine de gloire et de renom;
Pour deux grandes princesses
Je perds ma royauté:
L'une a fait le plus grand des rois;
L'autre le tient dessous ses lois;
Pour vous, grandes princesses,
Je perds ma royauté.

This complimentary address was most graciously received by both queens, and obtained a flattering response from Marie de Médicis.

Venus then presented a golden apple to Henriette Marie, and Pallas laid her spear and shield at the princess's feet. This done, the Olympian troop retired, and shortly afterwards the three royal ladies arose and retired to an ante-chamber.

Presently, the orchestra again struck up, and the ball commenced with a coranto, in which a vast number of couples took part. Then followed a branle, and while this was going on, the Duc de Montbazon made his way to Charles and his companions, and besought them to follow him.

As soon as they were out of the crowd, Montbazon said to the prince, "The queen is about to dance a saraband with the Princess Henriette Marie, the Comtesse de la Torre, and the Comtesse Monteleone, and it is her majesty's desire that your

highness and my lord of Buckingham take part in the dance."

"I am fully sensible of the honour intended me, M. le Duc," replied Charles, "but I must pray you to make my excuses to the queen."

"I dare not deliver such an answer, prince," rejoined Montbazon. "Her majesty is not accustomed to refusal. I must entreat you to make your excuses in person. Do you, my lord," he added to Buckingham, "decline the proffered honour?"

"Decline it! Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Buckingham. "I am entirely at her majesty's disposal — in this as in all other matters."

Montbazon then conducted Charles and his companions to the ante-room, whither the two queens had retired. Here they found Marie de Médicis, with four ladies attired in magnificent Spanish dresses, each of different coloured silk, but all richly embroidered with fringes of gold, and ornamented with knots of ribands. Though these ladies were masked, it was not difficult to distinguish in two of them the queen and the princess.

Anne of Austria wore a yellow satin basquina, which suited her exquisite figure to perfection, and Henriette Marie was attired in a blush-coloured dress of the same material and make, which became her equally well. The Comtesse de Torre and the Comtesse Monteleone were dressed respectively in white and blue,

On entering the room, Montbazon advanced to the queen and said a few words to her, on hearing which she manifested her disappointment by a slight impatient gesture, but desired him to bring forward the prince and his companions. This was done, and they were presented, but under what designations Charles did not hear.

"The Duc de Montbazon tells me, prince," said Anne of Austria, in a slight tone of pique, "that you are unwilling to dance with me."

"Not unwilling, madame," replied Charles, "but unable. I do not dance the saraband."

"It is the easiest dance imaginable," said the queen. "I wish you would try it."

"I dare not, madame," returned Charles. "I should only be an embarrassment to your majesty, and incur the ridicule of the company."

"Have courage and make the attempt, prince," cried Henriette Marie. "We will take care you shall make no mistake."

"Even with this encouragement I will not venture," returned Charles. "I shall not rise in your opinion if I confess that I care little for lively figures, and confine myself to the pavane and pazzameno."

"The pavane is my favourite dance," cried the princess.

"Were it given, I would ask to be your partner," said Charles, gallantly.

"The princess will be charmed to dance with you," said Marie de Médicis, answering for her daughter. "After the saraband we will have a pavane."

"The Duc de Montbazon tells me you are going to Spain, prince," said Anne of Austria to Charles. "You ought, therefore, to learn our national dances."

"I will practise them at Madrid," returned the prince. "But though I am unskilled in the saraband, the Marquis of Buckingham is not. May I offer him as my substitute in the dance?"

"I have heard that my Lord of Buckingham is the most graceful dancer in Europe," remarked the queen. "I am curious to know whether the report is correct."

"I am sorry your majesty's expectations have been so highly raised, as I shall probably disappoint them," rejoined Buckingham. "I have a passion for dancing — and of all dances those of Spain delight me most. But I have never yet found a partner who could dance the saraband with me."

"Perhaps you will make the same complaint of me to-morrow," returned the queen.

"Impossible, madame," said Buckingham. "There

is much more likelihood that I shall sink in your opinion."

"At all events, I promise to be lenient to your faults," rejoined Anne of Austria, smiling.

At this moment two young Spanish noblemen entered the room, and, on beholding them, the queen exclaimed that the party was complete, and calling for castanets, which were handed to all those about to dance the saraband, bade the Duc de Montbazon order the band to strike up. The order was promptly obeyed, and while inspiriting strains animated the whole assemblage, the four couples issued from the ante-room into the grand saloon. Graham had the distinguished honour of leading out the Princess Henriette Marie. All were masked, but as it was generally known that the queen and the princess were the chief dancers, great curiosity was excited.

In another moment the dancers had taken up their position, and as they threw themselves into a graceful preliminary attitude, every eye was fixed upon them. Nothing could be more exquisite than the posture assumed by the queen; it was beautiful, disdainful, and full of witchery. In another moment the merry rattle of castanets was heard, and the dance began.

Every movement of Anne of Austria was marked by the same grace that distinguished her in repose,

and each turn of the dance served to reveal fresh beauties. Alternately she appeared to be excited by coquetry, agitated by gentle emotions of love, stirred by jealousy, and inflamed by rage. All these emotions were admirably portrayed, while the most difficult steps were executed with consummate ease and grace, and with inconceivable rapidity.

Buckingham well sustained his character as the best dancer of his day. So much grace and agility had never before been displayed in that hall by any devotee of Terpsichore.

If the Princess Henriette Marie did not display the fire and passion exhibited by the queen, or possess in so high a degree as her majesty the poetry of motion, she acquitted herself charmingly, and delighted Charles, who watched her movements with admiration.

While the saraband was proceeding, the king entered the saloon, and his attention being drawn to Buckingham, he inquired who he was, and not being able to obtain the information from those around him, sent for the Duc de Montbazon.

"Who is the queen's partner?" demanded Louis, as the duke came up.

"An English nobleman, sire," replied Montbazon, without hesitation.

"An English nobleman!" exclaimed the king,

surprised. "I concluded he was a Spaniard. He dances like a hidalgo. His name — and title?"

"I find it impossible to pronounce his name, sire, so you must excuse my attempting it, but he is a person of high rank."

"You are quite sure he is an Englishman, M. le Duc? He has not the air of one."

"I am quite sure of it, sire. There are two other Englishmen of rank in the ball-room — one of whom is dancing with the Princess Henriette Marie. They are merely passing through Paris on their way to Madrid, so I have not presented them to your majesty."

"Did I not deem it impossible, I should say that the person dancing with the queen must be the Marquis of Buckingham," observed the Comte d'Auvergne.

"Perhaps it is Buckingham," cried the Duc de Luynes.

"Bah!" exclaimed Louis. "The notion is absurd. You might as well assert the Prince of Wales is in the room."

"Just as well, sire, — one assertion is as likely as the other," said Montbazon. And anxious to avoid further explanation, he craved leave to withdraw.

By this time the saraband had concluded, and the dancers returned to the ante-room.

Anne of Austria seated herself on a fauteuil, but did not dismiss Buckingham, who remained standing near her. Charles also had re-entered the room and approached the Princess Henriette Marie, who had taken a seat beside the queen-mother.

"You must be too much fatigued with your exertions to go through the pavane, princess," he observed.

"Dancing never fatigues me," she replied. "It is the pleasantest exercise one can take. I prefer it to hawking and hunting."

"I have ever preferred the tilt-yard to the ball-room," returned Charles; "but were I to remain long at this court my tastes would certainly undergo a change."

"You flatter me by saying so, prince. But I do not entirely believe you."

"Nay, it is truth," said Charles, gallantly.

"Here comes the Duc de Montbazon to announce that the pavane is about to begin," observed Marie de Médicis to her daughter. "Are you ready?"

"Quite," replied Henriette Marie. "I need no further repose."

And rising at the same time, she gave her hand to Charles, who led her into the saloon.

The appearance of the princess served as a signal

to the orchestra, and the other couples being already placed, the dance at once commenced.

The stately character of the pavane, all the movements of which were slow and dignified, displayed Charles's majestic deportment to the utmost advantage, and he excited quite as much admiration as Buckingham had just done in the sparkling saraband.

That two such stars, each so brilliant, though differing in splendour, should appear at the same time, was sufficient to cause excitement, and general inquiries began to be made as to who the distinguished strangers could be. But though many conjectures were hazarded, all were wide of the mark.

In Henriette Marie the prince found a partner every way worthy of him. If she did not rival him in dignity, she equalled him in grace, and Charles himself, who had been struck by the vivacity exhibited by the princess in the previous dance, was surprised by the stateliness she now displayed.

XIII.

How Tom fell desperately in Love.

MEANTIME, Buckingham remained in the anteroom, standing beside Anne of Austria, whose charms had already inspired him with a passion so violent,

that he would have sacrificed the expedition on which he was bent, and the prince whom he attended, to obtain one favouring smile from her. Such was his overweening vanity, such the confidence he felt in his own irresistible powers of fascination, that he persuaded himself that the queen was not insensible to his admiration.

Careless of any consequences that might ensue should he be recognised, he had removed his mask. His looks breathed passion, and to every light word he uttered he sought to convey tender significance. Whether from coquetry, or that Buckingham's admiration was not disagreeable to her, certain it is that the queen did not reprove his audacity; and thus emboldened, he well-nigh forgot that many curious eyes were watching him, many ears listening to catch his words.

"And so you depart to-morrow for Madrid, my lord?" said the queen.

"The prince has so arranged it, madame," returned Buckingham, "but at a word from you, I stay."

"Nay, I cannot detain you," she rejoined. "Would I were going thither myself!" she added, with a sigh. "But I shall never more behold the city I love so well — never more set foot in the palace where the happiest hours of my life were spent."

"You surprise me, madame," cried Buckingham. "Is it possible that, occupying your present splendid position as sovereign mistress of this brilliant court, you can have any regrets for the past?"

"Splendour of position is not everything, my lord," returned Anne of Austria. "I was happier as the Infanta than I am as Queen of France." Then feeling she had said too much, she added, "To you, my lord, I will venture to utter what I would confide to few others. My heart is in Spain — I am still a stranger here, and shall ever continue so. When you see my sister, the Infanta Maria, repeat my words to her."

"I will do whatever your majesty enjoins, though your regrets for Spain may make the Infanta loth to quit her native land."

"Ah! but your prince will reconcile her to the step — I am sure of it. I can read loyalty and devotion in his noble features. Where Charles Stuart gives his hand he will give his whole heart."

"You are an excellent physiognomist, madame," said Buckingham. "You have read the prince's character aright."

"Then my sister will be truly fortunate if she wins him. You say I am a good physiognomist, my lord, but your opinion will alter, I fear, when

I declare that I see inconstancy written in your features as plainly as fidelity is stamped on those of the Prince of Wales."

"There your majesty is undoubtedly in error," returned Buckingham. "What you say may be true of the past, because till now my heart has never been touched. But the impression it has this night received is indelible as it is vivid."

And he threw a passionate glance at the queen, who cast down her eyes.

"Has not your majesty some slight token of regard that I may convey to the Infanta?" he inquired. "It would make me more welcome to her."

"I have nothing to send," replied the queen. "Had I known you were going to Madrid beforehand, I might have been prepared. Stay, take this," she added, giving him a small, richly-chased vinaigrette, at which she had just breathed.

Buckingham took it rapturously.

"My sister will recollect it, and will know it comes from me," said Anne of Austria.

"I may not keep it, then?" rejoined Buckingham, imploringly. "'Twill be hard to part with it."

"I do not insist upon your delivering it," returned the queen. "But such a trifle is not worth keeping."

Buckingham's looks showed that he thought far otherwise.

Here it was well that this brief but dangerous interview was terminated by the return of Charles and Henriette Marie.

It was not without a severe pang that Buckingham tore himself away from one who had gained such a sudden and complete ascendancy over him. Fickle he had ever hitherto been in affairs of the heart, but he now submitted to the force of a great and overpowering passion. Nor could he liberate himself from it. Anne of Austria ever afterwards remained sovereign mistress of his heart, and his insane passion for her led him to commit acts of inconceivable folly.

Charles, as we have said, had returned with his fair partner to the ante-chamber, and on seeing them the queen signed to Henriette Marie to take a seat beside her. The princess obeyed, and as she sat down it was easy to perceive from her looks that she had enjoyed the dance, and Anne was making a remark to that effect, when the Duc de Montbazon came suddenly into the room, and made his way without ceremony to Charles, who was standing with Buckingham near the queen.

"What is the matter, M. le Duc?" cried Anne of Austria, seeing, from his manner, that something *was wrong.*

"The prince and his attendants must quit the Louvre immediately," returned Montbazon. "The king has been struck by their appearance, and has been making inquiries about them, but has failed in obtaining any precise information. Unluckily, my son, the Comte de Rochefort, who has been in England, has made a guess not far wide of the truth, and his majesty's suspicions having become aroused, he will not rest till they are satisfied. Under these circumstances," he added, turning to Charles, "your highness's wisest course will be to depart at once."

"Where is the king?" demanded Anne of Austria, uneasily.

"Madame, he is in the ball-room at this moment," replied Montbazon; "but he is certain to come hither before long, and if he finds the prince and my Lord of Buckingham with your majesty, it will be impossible to prevent a discovery; and then I much fear the meditated journey to Madrid will have to be postponed."

"That must not be," cried the queen. "Fly, prince," she added to Charles. "Stand upon no ceremony, but begone. Adieu, my lord," she said to Buckingham; "forget not my message to my sister."

And as he bent before her she extended her

hand to him, and he fervently pressed it to his lips.

"Adieu, princess," said Charles to Henriette Marie; "I had hoped to dance the pazzameno with you, but that is now impossible."

"So it seems," replied Henriette Marie. "I am almost selfish enough to desire you might be detained. But since you must go, I wish you a safe and pleasant journey to Madrid. Adieu, prince."

Charles then made a profound obeisance to Marie de Médicis, as did Buckingham and Graham, the latter having emerged from an embrasure, where he had been chatting with the Comtesse de la Torre. All three then quitted the room, and one of them, as we are aware, left his heart behind him. By the advice of the Duc de Montbazon, they kept on the right of the grand saloon, and so avoided the king, who was on the other side of the hall.

Ever self-possessed, Charles manifested no undue haste, but moved majestically through the long suite of apartments which he had previously traversed.

Among the pages and attendants collected in the grand corridor was Chevilly, and on seeing the prince and his companions, and finding they desired to depart, he conducted them to the vestibule, where he left them while he summoned their carriage.

In a few minutes he reappeared, ushered them to the coach, and, posted on the marche-pied as before, attended them to their hotel. On dismissing him, the prince rewarded him with a dozen pistoles.

It was fortunate for the success of Charles's project that he did not delay his departure. He had not quitted the ante-room many minutes when the king entered it. His majesty's countenance appeared disturbed, and he glanced inquisitively round the room.

"Where are those Englishmen?" he said abruptly to the queen. "I was told they were here."

"They are gone, sire," replied Anne. "I am sorry for it. They dance remarkably well. Don't you think so, sire?"

"I scarcely noticed their dancing," rejoined Louis, sharply. "But I want to know who they are."

"You must apply to the Duc de Montbazon then, sire," said the queen. "They are English noblemen, that is all I can tell you."

"Their rank is undoubted, sire," remarked Marie de Médicis. "You may take my assurance for that."

"You know them, madame?" cried Louis.

"I do," she replied. "But I am not at liberty to disclose their names to-night. To-morrow I will tell you who they are. Suspend your curiosity till then."

With this the king was obliged to be content, and soon afterwards returned to the ball-room, but in no very good humour.

Before retiring to rest, Charles wrote a long letter to his august father, describing his journey to Paris, and detailing all that had befallen him since his arrival in the French capital. Besides recording his impressions of the principal personages he had seen at the Luxembourg and the Louvre, Charles spoke in rapturous terms of the beauty of Anne of Austria, but he did not praise the Princess Henriette Marie as highly as she deserved. To have said all he thought of her, might have appeared like disloyalty to the Infanta. Buckingham at the same time indited a humorous epistle to his dear dad and gossip.

As soon as these despatches were completed, they were consigned to a courier who was waiting for them, and who started, without a moment's delay, for Calais.

"Henriette Marie is very charming," thought Charles, as he sought his couch. "I cannot get her out of my head."

"Anne of Austria is the loveliest creature on earth," cried Buckingham, as he paced to and fro within his chamber, thinking over the events of the evening. "I am in despair at quitting Paris. Yet *I must go.*"

XIV.

In what manner Jack and Tom left Paris, and of the Adventure they met with in the Forest of Orléans.

NEXT morning, at a very early hour, Charles was aroused from his slumbers by Cottington, who entered the prince's chamber with a light.

"Is it time to arise, Cottington?" demanded Charles, drowsily.

"Your highness can rest as long as you please," replied the other. "Since midnight, an order has been sent by the king to all postmasters, prohibiting them to supply us with horses. It will be impossible, therefore, for your highness to leave Paris."

"But I will not be stayed!" cried Charles, starting up in his couch. "I will buy horses if I cannot hire them. See to it, Cottington — see to it."

"Permit me to observe to your highness that horses are not to be bought at this untimely hour, and, before we can procure them, in all probability a further order will be issued by the king interdicting your departure from Paris."

"Call my lord of Buckingham, and bid him come to me instantly," cried Charles.

But before the order could be obeyed, Graham burst into the chamber, exclaiming: "Good news! good news! your highness will be able to start for

Madrid after all. M. Chevilly is without, and says he can remove the new difficulty that has arisen."

"That is good news indeed, Dick!" cried Charles. "Let him come in. Good-morrow, Chevilly," he added, as the valet made his appearance. "What can you do for us?"

"I can help your highness to leave Paris," replied Chevilly. "The duke my master has sent you horses. They are the best in his stables, and will carry you twenty or thirty leagues with ease. A piqueur and two palefreniers will go with you to bring them back. If I may presume to do so, I would respectfully counsel your highness to start as speedily as may be, for fear of further interruption."

"Your counsel is good, Chevilly, and shall not be neglected," returned Charles. "Let all prepare for immediate departure."

On this the chamber was cleared, and Charles, springing from his couch, proceeded to attire himself for the journey.

Meantime, under the careful surveillance of Chevilly, the superb steeds, sent for the use of the prince and his attendants by the considerate Duc de Montbazon, were saddled and bridled by the palefreniers, who next proceeded to secure the pack-saddles, containing the baggage, on their own *hackneys.*

In less than half an hour all necessary preparations were completed, and shortly afterwards Charles and Buckingham, accoutred in their new riding-dresses, boots, and broad-leaved hats, entered the salle à manger, where the rest of the party were assembled. Such was the prince's impatience to be gone, that he declined to partake of the breakfast that had been prepared for him, and thrusting a pair of pistols into his belt, and throwing a cartouche-belt over his shoulder, called out, "To horse, gentlemen, to horse!"

Marshalled by the host, whose account had already been discharged by Endymion Porter, the whole party repaired to the court-yard, where the steeds were impatiently pawing the ground. Charles selected a powerful black charger for his own use, and Buckingham made choice of a magnificent grey.

"I trust the duke your master will not incur his majesty's displeasure by the service he has rendered me," said Charles to Chevilly, as the latter held his stirrup.

"My master promised the queen that your highness's departure should not be prevented — and he has kept his word," replied the valet.

"Fail not to make my best acknowledgments to him," said Charles, bestowing a handful of pistoles on Chevilly as he vaulted into the saddle. "Farewell, friend."

In another minute, the whole party being mounted, the gates of the hotel were thrown open, and the cavalcade issued forth into the Rue de Bourbon, preceded by the piqueur.

But for this avant garde, who answered all questions satisfactorily, they must have been stopped by the watch. Having traversed the Rue Jacob, the Rue Colombier, and several other sombre streets, they skirted the high walls surrounding the close of the great convent of Carthusians, and at last reached the Barrière d'Enfer, where they were detained for a short time, as the gate was not yet opened, and the warder refused to let them pass, but on the production by the piqueur of an order from the Duc de Montbazon, the obstacle was removed, and they were allowed to proceed on their journey.

No sooner were they clear of the Faubourg Saint Jacques, than, setting spurs to their steeds, they galloped along the high road to Orléans, passing without halt, or slackening of pace, through Bourg la Reine, Sceaux, and Berny, and never pausing till they reached Longjumeau, where they pulled up for a few minutes at a cabaret to refresh their horses and drink a cup of wine.

The arrival of the cavalcade in the little town at this early hour in the morning — it was then only seven o'clock — created quite a sensation, and many of the inhabitants flocked towards the cabaret

to look at them. All knew, from their horses and attendants, that they must be persons of rank, but the piqueur, though questioned by the aubergiste and the garçons d'écurie, would give no information, except that they were English noblemen.

Neither Charles nor Buckingham dismounted, and their distinguished appearance pointed them out as the chief personages of the troop. After they had drunk a flagon of Anjou wine, which was handed them by the hôtelier, Charles exclaimed,

"What ails you, Tom? You have not uttered a word since we left Paris. I never knew you so silent before."

"I have been thinking of that divine queen," responded Buckingham. "But you have been equally silent, Jack. I suspect, from your pensive air, that your thoughts have been occupied by the charming princess. Am I not right?"

"Her image will recur to me, I own," rejoined Charles. "But henceforward I shall banish it, and think only of the Infanta. But we have stayed here long enough. Allons, messieurs!" he cried to his attendants.

At the words, Cottington and the two others, who were standing at the door of the cabaret talking to the host, instantly mounted their steeds, the palefreniers followed their example, and the piqueur, taking off his cap to Charles, rode on in advance.

The whole party then set off at a gallop, and were soon out of sight.

On, on they went, flying like the wind past the old château of Mont-Lhéry, perched on its rocky heights, and traversing a pleasant country, erst dyed with Burgundian blood, clearing league after league without fatigue to themselves, and apparently without fatigue to their gallant coursers, until they reached Arpajan.

After a brief halt they again set forward, speeding on swiftly as before, devouring the distance that lay between the pretty little town they had just quitted and Etrecy.

By this time both Charles and Buckingham, having quite recovered their spirits, laughed and chatted merrily. Everything contributed to make their journey agreeable — a fine day, and a charming country, presenting a succession of lovely landscapes.

How rapidly and easily we get on," cried Charles. "These admirable horses will spoil us for the rest of the journey. It is a pity we shall lose them at Etampes."

"I see no reason for that," rejoined Buckingham. "With an hour's rest they will carry us several leagues farther. If they should be harmed, which is not likely, we will replace them by horses from England."

On arriving at Etampes, Charles consulted the piqueur, who said:

"Monseigneur, with an hour's rest here, and another hour at Artenay, the horses will carry you very well to Orléans."

"But that is more than the duke your master bargained for, my good friend," said Charles.

"Pardon, monseigneur. My master has placed the horses entirely at your disposal," rejoined the piqueur. "Do as you please with them."

"Then you shall go on with us to Orléans," said Charles. "We will not part with the horses a league sooner than necessary."

After the lapse of an hour, during which the horses had been well cared for, and their riders recruited by a plentiful repast and several flasks of excellent wine, the whole party got once more into the saddle, and were soon scouring across the broad and fertile plains of La Beauce, in the direction of Montdésir. Acting on the piqueur's suggestions, Charles and his companions made another halt at Artenay, and then set forward again.

Night was now rapidly approaching, and it soon became quite dark. Moreover, just as they entered the Forest of Orléans — a vast woody region of some leagues in extent, which lay between them and that city — a heavy thunderstorm came on, accompanied by torrents of rain. No place of shelter being

near, there was nothing for it but to brave the storm, so, wrapping their cloaks around them, they went on. Peal after peal of thunder rattled overhead, and the flashes of lightning were almost blinding. Still the piqueur rode gallantly on, and the cavalcade followed him.

Despite the personal inconvenience he endured, the storm excited Charles's admiration. One moment all was buried in obscurity; the next, the whole thicket seemed in a blaze. Thus shown by the vivid flashes, the trees looked so weird and fantastic, that it almost seemed to the prince as if he was riding through an enchanted forest. For some time the cavalcade, headed by the piqueur, went on without interruption, but at last the broken state of the ground compelled them to proceed with caution.

Suddenly the piqueur came to a stop, and owned that he had missed his way. But he felt certain, he said, that he could soon regain it. A consultation was then held as to the best course to be pursued under the circumstances. Buckingham and some of the others were for turning back, but Charles, believing the piqueur could get them out of the difficulty, determined to go on.

Accordingly, the cavalcade got once more into motion, but now proceeded at a foot's pace. The alley which they were threading was of considerable

length, but it brought them in the end to an open space, in the midst of which grew three or four trees of the largest size and great age, veritable patriarchs of the grove. But here the difficulties of the travellers appeared to have increased, for though there were several outlets from the clearance they had gained, they could not tell which to select.

While they were in this state of incertitude, it was with no slight satisfaction that they descried through the gloom a figure approaching them. As this person drew nearer, the lightning showed him to be a powerfully-built man, in the garb of a peasant. Probably a woodcutter, as he carried a hatchet on his shoulder.

"What ho, master!" cried the piqueur, calling out to him. "Wilt guide us to the high road to Orléans?"

"Ay, marry will I," replied the woodcutter; "but you have strayed far away from it, and are not likely to find it again without help. It is lucky for you that I came up, or you might have passed the night in the forest."

"Is there no place where we can dry our wet apparel and obtain refreshment?" said Charles.

"You cannot do better than come to my cottage, messieurs," replied the man. "My name is Jacques Leroux. I am a woodcutter, as my father was before me, and my grandfather before him, and as my

sons André and Marcel will be after me; but I have saved some money, and live comfortably enough, as you will see. Many a traveller who has missed his way in the forest, as you have done to-night, has fared well — though I say it — and slept soundly at my cottage."

"Perchance too soundly," remarked Buckingham, with a laugh. "Well, we will go to thy cottage, honest Jacques," he continued, "and when the storm is over thou shalt take us to the road to Orléans, and we will reward thee handsomely."

"The storm will be over in an hour," said Jacques Leroux, "and then the moon will have risen. Once on the highway, you will soon reach Orléans."

"I am glad to hear it," cried Buckingham. "Canst give us aught for supper, honest Jacques?"

"My larder is not badly supplied," replied the woodcutter, with a laugh, "and I have a few flasks of rare Beaugency in my cellar."

"Nay, if thou hast a larder and cellar we shall not fare badly," said Buckingham. "Lead us to thy cottage, good Jacques."

"This way, messieurs," returned the woodcutter, striking into an alley on the right, which proved so narrow and intricate that the horsemen were obliged to proceed along it singly. Jacques Leroux, however, being familiar with the path, tracked it with-

out difficulty, and at a quick pace, but he ever and anon stopped to cheer on those behind him.

"You appear to be taking us into the heart of the forest, friend," cried Charles, who was at the head of the column.

"You are within a bow-shot of my dwelling, monsieur," replied the woodcutter. "You will see the lights in a moment. I will let my daughter know I am coming," he added, placing a whistle to his lips, and blowing a shrill and somewhat startling call.

Immediately afterwards the troop emerged upon a patch of ground entirely free from timber. In the midst of this area stood a cottage, with a stable and some other outbuildings attached to it.

Again Jacques Leroux blew his whistle, and no sooner had he done so than the cottage door was thrown open, allowing the radiance of a cheerful fire to stream forth. Just within the threshold might be seen a young woman, and a boy some ten or twelve years old, whom the woodcutter informed Charles were his youngest son Marcel, and his daughter Rose.

"Our young foresters call her Rose des Bois," said Jacques, with a laugh, "and several of them are anxious to take her from me, but I don't desire to part with her just yet. Will it please you to alight, messieurs? You need have no anxiety

about the horses. There is a stable large enough to hold them all, and Marcel will find them plenty of good fodder."

"You seem well provided with everything, friend," observed Charles, as he alighted.

"Heaven be praised, I want nothing, and am well contented with my lot," replied the woodcutter.

By this time the whole party had alighted, and Jacques called to his son to bring a lantern and help the palefreniers to take the horses to the stable. This order being promptly obeyed, the woodcutter ushered his guests into his dwelling, and on passing through the doorway Charles and his companions found themselves in a large comfortable room, cheerfully illumined by a wood fire, which was blazing on the hearthstone.

Benches were set on either side of the wide-mouthed chimney, and in the middle of the room there was a large oak table, with several stools placed around it. A gammon of bacon, a goodly stock of hams with other dried meats depending from the rafters, showed that the cottage did not lack the materials of good cheer, while an open cupboard displayed a large pasty, a cheese, eggs, butter, and an abundant supply of bread — far more than seemed to be required by the woodcutter and his family.

Besides these unmistakable evidences of plenty, which were very satisfactory to the travellers, a large black iron pot, hanging from a hook over the fire, diffused an odour throughout the chamber that left no doubt as to the savoury nature of its contents.

At the moment the party entered, the wood-cutter's daughter was placing fresh logs on the fire, and as she turned to salute them, they were all struck by her good looks, and Charles remarked to her father that she well deserved her appellation of Rose des Bois.

The damsel, who might be about eighteen, had a rich dark complexion, bright black eyes, somewhat too bold, perhaps, in expression, hair black as jet, and growing low down on the forehead, and strongly marked, handsome eyebrows. She wore large gold earrings, gold ornaments in her lace cap, and a gold cross above her bodice. The skirts of her scarlet petticoat were short enough to display her well-formed limbs, and her sabots were no disfigurement to her trim ankles and small feet. The drawbacks to her beauty were the bold looks we have mentioned, and a somewhat masculine manner.

She eyed the travellers with unrestrained curiosity, and though she could rarely have seen such visitors, did not appear at all abashed. Graham,

however, chiefly attracted her attention, and she more than once regarded him fixedly.

Throwing off their cloaks, the travellers seated themselves on the benches near the fire, to dry their wet apparel. While they were thus disposed, and active preparations for supper were being made by Jacques and his daughter, the latter of whom was spreading a snow-white cloth on the table, the two palefreniers entered with the saddle-bags which Endymion Porter had ordered to be brought into the cottage. On perceiving this arrangement, which he had evidently not anticipated, a cloud came over the woodcutter's brow, and he cast a significant look at his daughter.

The look did not escape Graham, and from its peculiarity awakened his suspicions. He said nothing, however, but, getting up from the bench, sat down near the table, and while chatting gaily with Rose, kept a watchful eye upon her father.

Having placed a large pasty, with other cold provisions, on the table, Jacques Leroux told his daughter that he was going to fetch a few flasks of Beaugency, and quitted the chamber by a side-door. No sooner was he gone than Rose drew close to Graham, and said, in a low tone,

"What has brought you here?"

"We came by your father's invitation," replied the young man, in the same tone.

"Jacques Leroux is not my father," replied Rose. "But no matter. What it concerns you to know is, that you are in danger of your life. You may have heard that the Forest of Orléans is infested by a band of robbers. Jacques Leroux is their captain. He has contrived to ensnare you, and, be assured, he will not let you escape."

"Bah! we are too numerous a party, and too well armed, to fear attack," rejoined Graham. "You want to frighten me away, my pretty Rose. But I will not go, unless you will consent to accompany me."

"You think I am jesting, but I am in earnest, as you will find. You heard Jacques whistle as he approached the cottage. That was a signal to a scout, who immediately started to collect the band. They will be here presently."

"'Sdeath! this is more serious than I thought," said Graham, uneasily. "I must alarm my friends."

"On no account," she replied, imposing silence upon him by a look.

At this moment Jacques Leroux entered, carrying half a dozen flasks of wine, three of which he set upon the table, but he put the others aside.

"Don't drink that wine — it is drugged," whispered Rose des Bois.

"I am half inclined to blow out the rascal's

brains," said Graham, laying his hand upon a pistol.

Just then the outer door of the cottage was opened, and a young man, in a woodcutter's garb like that of Leroux, came in, and respectfully saluted the strangers.

"So you are returned from Courcelles, André," remarked Jacques, with a significant look at him. "Have you executed all my orders?"

"All, father," replied André.

"The band have arrived," whispered Rose des Bois. "But trust to me, and I will save you."

"By my faith, this is a devoted damsel," thought Graham. "But though I am willing to trust her, on the first movement made by these villains that looks like mischief I will shoot them, be the consequences what they may. The prince has been dying for an adventure — he has met with one at last. Hark'ee, my pretty Rose des Bois," he added, in an under tone to her. "There are far more valuable lives than mine at stake. None of my companions must be harmed."

"Trust to me, and you shall all get away safely," she replied.

As she spoke, the sound of horses was heard outside, and André, opening the door, exclaimed,

"There are more travellers here, father. What shall we do with their horses? The stable is full."

"Put them in the shed," replied Jacques. And he went out with his son, closing the door after him.

Scarcely were they gone, than Rose hastily removed the flasks which Jacques had set upon the table, and put the three others in their place.

"You may drink this wine with safety," she said to Graham.

Shortly afterwards, Jacques and André returned with half a dozen persons of very suspicious mien. As the new comers took off their cloaks and broad-leaved hats, it appeared they were all well armed with pistols and swords.

On their appearance, Charles and his companions moved from the fireside to the table.

"I have so many guests here to-night, messieurs," said Jacques to the new comers, "that I shall not be able to offer you very good accommodation. But I will do my best."

"That is all we require," said the foremost of the party. "You can give us a flask of good wine — that we know from experience."

"Ay, that I can — as good as you will get at Orléans," rejoined Jacques. "Pray be seated near the fire," he added, pointing to the benches vacated by Charles and his companions. "I will bring you the wine immediately, but I must first serve these gentlemen, who are waiting for supper."

With this, he proceeded to uncork the flasks which had just been set on the table by Rose, and filled the goblets for Charles and his companions.

"This is the Beaugency I spoke of, messieurs," he said. "It has a rare flavour. I will venture to say you never tasted wine equal to it."

"Then I propose a bumper all round," cried Graham, glancing at his companions. "Fill for yonder gentlemen, Maître Jacques."

"Ay, fill us bumpers, Jacques," shouted the guests at the fireplace.

"This flask is empty. I will bring you another, messieurs," cried the woodcutter, taking up one of those which Rose had removed.

While he was occupied in filling the flagons of the party near the fire, Rose whispered a word or two in Graham's ear.

"Nay, you and your son must join us, my good friend," cried the latter to Jacques.

"Doubt me not," replied the woodcutter, laughing. "Bring two more flagons, André."

The young man brought him the cups, which he instantly filled.

"To your health, messieurs!" cried Graham. "If you are the boon companions you seem, you will not leave a drop in the cup."

With this he emptied his goblet, and turned it upside down. All those at the table did the same.

"They are ours now," remarked Jacques, winking at his associates.

"You seem to hesitate, messieurs," cried Graham. "We have set you a good example."

"Hesitate — not we!" responded the foremost of the brigands. "To your healths, messieurs! May you always meet with honest men like us!"

And the whole party emptied their flagons, their example being followed by Jacques and André.

"By my faith, friend Jacques, this Beaugency of yours is a most powerful wine," cried Graham. "It has already got into my head. I feel quite drowsy."

"So do we," cried the others at the table.

"Take another cup — it won't hurt you," responded Jacques.

"Fill for me, then," said Graham.

As the woodcutter approached the table, he staggered and fell to the ground. André sprang to his father's assistance, but while trying to raise him, he also sank on the floor in a state of stupefaction.

"What's the matter?" cried Graham, rising from his chair. "Have you and your son been taken suddenly ill, my good friend?"

"We have drunk the wrong wine," cried Jacques to his comrades, trying in vain to rise.

"Malediction!" exclaimed the foremost of the brigands, tumbling from the bench.

So powerless had he and his comrades become, that not one of them could draw a pistol. In vain they struggled against the effects of the soporific potion they had swallowed. In another minute they were all buried in a profound stupor.

"We have had a narrow escape," cried Graham. "We owe our lives, perhaps, to this damsel."

"Let us quit the place immediately, and make the best of our way to Orléans," said Charles.

"You must take me with you," said Rose des Bois. "If I am left here, when these men recover they will infallibly put me to death."

"Do not imagine we are going to abandon you, after what you have done for us," replied Graham. "We will take you with us to Orléans, and, moreover, you shall be well rewarded."

Leaving the senseless brigands, the party then went forth, and, guided by Rose, proceeded towards the stable. Close to the building they found Marcel, who tried to escape on seeing them, but, being caught by Graham, the lad gave up the key of the stable, in which he had contrived to lock up the piqueur and palefreniers, who were clamouring lustily to get out. Without loss of time the men were set free, and the horses brought out. The pack-saddles were then fetched from the cottage,

and being secured as before, the whole party mounted their steeds. As Jacques Leroux had predicted, the storm had passed away. Still, though the moon was now shining brightly, and tipping the trees with silver, it was necessary to have a guide through the forest, so the travellers determined to take Marcel with them, and accordingly placed him in front of the piqueur, who had orders to shoot him if he misled them. The next point was how to convey Rose des Bois. This was settled by Graham, who took her on his saddle-bow.

All these arrangements being made with great expedition, the party set off, and following Marcel's directions, eventually reached the high road to Orléans.

Before this, however, the lad had contrived to loosen the belt by which he was bound to the piqueur, and, watching his opportunity, slipped off the horse; and, though the piqueur fired at him, he escaped uninjured, and disappeared among the trees. His flight, however, gave the party no concern.

In half an hour more they had cleared the forest, and had gained the faubourg of the ancient city of Orléans.

On reaching these habitations, Rose des Bois said to Graham:

"Here we must part. But whither are you going?"

"I am going far hence, my pretty Rose," he replied.

"But where?" she demanded, impatiently. "Tell me where."

"To Madrid," he replied. "It is not likely we shall meet again."

"Perhaps we may. Farewell!"

And, disengaging herself, she sprang lightly to the ground.

Graham offered her his purse, but she refused it with an impatient gesture, and hurried away.

The party then rode on to the gates of Orléans, and not without some difficulty obtained admittance to the city. This being at last accomplished, they proceeded to the Hôtel du Loiret, and entered it just as the bell of the cathedral tolled the hour of midnight.

XV.

How Jack and Tom rode to Bordeaux, and how they received a Visit from the Duc D'Epernon.

NEXT morning, at seven o'clock, our travellers started once more on their journey, mounted on post-horses, and attended by a couple of postilions.

Before setting out, Charles liberally rewarded the piqueur and the palefreniers, who undertook that the ends of justice should not be neglected, and promised to obtain from the magistrates of

the city a force sufficient for the capture of the brigands. This, we may state, was effected the same day, and the whole band brought prisoners to Orléans.

Our impatient travellers saw nothing of the ancient city, which derives its chief interest from the heroic and ill-fated Jeanne d'Arc, save what was presented to them as they traversed the streets to the Porte de Blois.

Their road now lay on the right bank of the Loire, and throughout the day they kept near that enchanting river, which mirrors on its waves such lovely vine-clad slopes and hills, and such picturesque old towns and grand feudal châteaux. Blois and Amboise, with their regal castles, detained the travellers for a short time, and it was not until nightfall that they reached Tours.

Off again next morning betimes, they approached Châtelleraut about noon, and traversing the antique bridge across the Vienne, garnished at either end with towers, they entered the town, and resting there for an hour, pursued their way to Poitiers, where they arrived sufficiently early to devote some time to the examination of a town replete with historical recollections, many of them of deep interest to Charles.

Before retiring to rest they heard vespers in the cathedral, and after attending matins in the beau-

tiful church of Sainte Radegonde, and visiting several other interesting structures, they started for Angoulême, arriving there, after a brief halt at Civray, early in the evening.

Again early in the saddle, and descending the steep hill on which Angoulême is reared, they speeded merrily along the valley, the limit of their day's journey being Bordeaux. At Barbezieux they stopped to dine, and at La Graulle came upon a bare and desolate heath of vast extent, which gave them a foretaste of the Landes, which they expected shortly to traverse.

At Cubsac, where in our own times there is a suspension-bridge of wondrous size and beauty, they crossed the broad estuary of the Dordogne in a ferry-boat, and had a somewhat perilous passage, the wind being high. However, they got over in safety, and pursued their journey through a fair and fertile region covered with vineyards, and gradually gained an eminence, from the summit of which the wide Garonne, with the proud city of Bordeaux throned on its opposite bank, burst upon their view.

The prospect was magnificent, and held them for some time in admiration. At length they descended the vine-clad slopes of the hill, and tracking a long avenue of fine trees, came to the ferry

at La Bastide — there was no bridge then across the Garonne — and immediately embarked.

During their passage across the broad and impetuous river they enjoyed an admirable view of the city, with its old walls, towers, churches, and edifices, chief among which were the cathedral with its twin spires, the Eglise Sainte Croix, Saint Michel with its beautiful detached belfry, Saint Saurin, the old Evêché, and the Hôtel de Ville. In the port were numerous vessels, for Bordeaux even then was a place of extensive commerce. The travellers landed near one of the ancient city gates, and caused their pack-saddles and horse furniture to be conveyed to an hotel.

Next morning, instead of prosecuting their journey, they spent several hours in inspecting the curiosities of the city, and had just returned from a visit to the port, when the hôtelier entered, and throwing open the door of the salon with as much ceremoniousness as an usher, announced M. le Duc d'Epernon.

The person who entered the room on this announcement was about seventy, but his tall figure was erect, and although his beard and moustaches were grey, his features retained something of the remarkable comeliness which had distinguished them in the days of Henri Trois.

The Duc d'Epernon was attired in a pourpoint.

and trunk hose of brown quilted satin, with a velvet mantle of the same colour, the latter being ornamented with the order of the Saint Esprit. On his head he wore a black velvet toque, adorned with a red feather and a diamond brooch. Funnel-topped boots, provided with large spurs, completed his costume, and he carried a cravache in his hand.

Immediately on his entrance, Charles and Buckingham arose to meet him, and their appearance and dignity of manner evidently struck him with surprise. While gravely and courteously saluting them, he carefully scanned their features.

"I have to apologise to you for this intrusion, messieurs," he said, with exquisite politeness, "but I will explain the motive of my visit, and then I trust you will excuse it."

"Your visit requires no excuse, M. le Duc," replied Charles, with princely grace. "That a nobleman of such distinction as yourself, one of the brightest ornaments of the courts of Henri Trois and Henri le Grand, should visit persons so obscure as myself and my brother, Tom Smith, is an honour we never could have anticipated, and we cannot fail, therefore, to be highly gratified by your condescension."

"Corbleu! monsieur," cried D'Epernon, bowing and smiling, "unless I am greatly mistaken, there is little condescension on my part. Had I been aware

of your rank, rest assured I should not have presented myself in this unceremonious manner, and I must again entreat you to excuse me."

"And I must repeat," returned Charles, "that the honour is entirely on our side. Pray be seated, M. le Duc."

"I have lived too much in courts, monsieur, to be deceived," observed D'Epernon, taking the chair offered him by the prince. "It may please you and your brother to style yourselves the Messieurs Smith, but I do not think I should be far wrong if I gave you the highest titles your country can boast. But to my errand. In me, messieurs, you behold the representative of an epoch, now passed away, when it was customary for the nobility of France to exercise hospitality towards all strangers. I cannot change my old habits. I have a château in the neighbourhood of this city, and chancing to ride over this morning, I accidentally heard that some English travellers were staying in this hotel. I therefore came hither to pray you to be my guests for as long a period as it may please you to remain with me."

"We would gladly accept your hospitality, M. le Duc," replied Charles, "but to-morrow we start for Bayonne and Spain."

"Then I can only express my regret, messieurs," replied D'Epernon, rising. "It would have gratified

me to entertain you at my château, and to show you some of the beauties of this country, but I will not attempt to delay you."

"Stay, M. le Duc," said Buckingham. "With you there can be no necessity for disguise, and I will, therefore, inform you that the person whom you have had the honour of addressing is no other than Charles, Prince of Wales."

"I felt assured of it," replied D'Epernon, bowing to the ground. "And you, monseigneur, unless I am greatly mistaken, are the Marquis of Buckingham."

"You are right, M. le Duc," said Charles. "But I confide myself to your discretion. I am travelling strictly incognito."

"Your highness may entirely rely on me," returned D'Epernon. "I guess the purpose of your journey to Spain. It is an enterprise worthy of a chivalrous prince like yourself. I trust you may meet with no interruption, and to prevent the chance of your detention at Bayonne, I will furnish you with a letter to the governor of that city, my friend, the Comte de Grammont. I am banished from court, as your highness may possibly be aware, having had the misfortune to make Cardinal Richelieu my enemy; but I have still influence enough for this."

So saying, he sat down at the table, on which

writing materials were laid, and traced a few lines on a sheet of paper, which he folded up and respectfully presented to Charles.

"If I can be of any further service, your highness has only to command me," he said.

"You can, indeed, serve me in an important particular, M. le Duc," returned Charles. "I am desirous of sending a despatch to the king my father, and need a trusty courier."

"Your highness need give yourself no further trouble. I will find the man you require. In an hour he shall be ready to start."

"I have yet another favour to ask of you, M. le Duc," said Charles.

"It is granted before asked, prince," replied D'Epernon.

"You may repent your rashness," rejoined Charles, smiling. "However, not to keep you in suspense, I will pray you, if you have no better engagement, to give me your company during the remainder of the day. On some future occasion I shall hope to be your guest."

"I would forego any other engagement to accept the invitation, prince," replied D'Epernon, delighted. "I will but seek out the courier, and then place myself at your highness's disposal during the rest of the day."

"We must talk to you, M. le Duc, of your pen-

less queen, Anne of Austria, and the lovely princess, Henriette Marie," said Buckingham.

"Have you seen them?" asked D'Epernon, quickly.

"Ay, and danced with them at the Louvre — and without his majesty's knowledge or permission," rejoined Buckingham.

"You surprise me," exclaimed D'Epernon. "I should not have conceived such an adventure possible. But you must regale me with the particulars anon. As I told you, I am a banished man, and know little about the court. But I pity the queen from my heart."

"So do I," sighed Buckingham.

"What think you, prince, of the daughter of my old master, Henri Quatre?" remarked D'Epernon to Charles. "I have not seen her of late, but she promised to be beautiful, and I hear she is so."

"She is charming," replied Charles, emphatically.

"So charming, that our journey to Madrid had well-nigh come to an end, M. le Duc," observed Buckingham, laughing.

"On her account I would it had," rejoined D'Epernon, smiling. "But I fly to execute your highness's order."

And, with a profound reverence, he quitted the room.

Charles and Buckingham then sat down to prepare their despatches, and gave their "dear dad and gossip" an account of their journey from Paris to Bordeaux, omitting, however, all mention of their adventure in the Forest of Orléans, thinking, with reason, that it might cause his majesty alarm. By the time they had finished, D'Epernon returned, telling them the courier was ready to start, and the despatches were forthwith committed to him.

This done, D'Epernon prayed the prince and his attendants to ride with him to view his château, stating that he had horses at their service, and the proposition being readily agreed to, the party went forth with the duke, and were not a little surprised to find a company of thirty gentlemen attired in the duke's splendid livery, and all well mounted, drawn up before the hotel.

"Are you generally attended by so large an escort as this, M. le Duc?" inquired Charles, smiling.

"Ma foi! prince, this is a very sorry attendance," replied the duke. "During the regency of the queen-mother, I used to go daily to the Louvre with an escort of eight hundred gentlemen."

"So I have heard, M. le Duc," observed Buckingham. "On my return, I will take as large an escort to Whitehall," he thought.

At a sign from D'Epernon, several of his retinue

immediately dismounted, and Charles and his companions being thus provided with horses, the party rode to the duke's château, a vast feudal-looking edifice, situated on an eminence on the left bank of the Garonne, about a couple of leagues from Bordeaux. The terrace commanded a superb view of the noble river that swept past it, as well as of the picturesque city in the distance. The finest wine in the district was grown on the duke's estate, and his guests having tasted it and greatly admired it, D'Epernon insisted upon sending a supply for their consumption at the hotel.

After an hour spent in inspecting the château and its beautiful gardens, the party returned to Bordeaux. An excellent dinner was then served, comprehending most of the delicacies for which Bordeaux is renowned, but its chief merit was the incomparable wine furnished by D'Epernon. More than a dozen flasks were crushed. D'Epernon proved a very agreeable companion, and with pardonable egotism recounted many of the incidents of his eventful life.

"It has been my fate," he said, "to witness the assassination of my two royal masters. I was near Henri Trois when the accursed Dominican, Jacques Clément, plunged a knife into his breast, and I was in the carriage with Henri le Grand when that good *king* was stabbed by the monster Ravaillac. No

monarch was ever more beloved than Henri Quatre, and yet he perished thus. I counsel your highness to be ever on your guard. And you, too, my lord of Buckingham, I would have you take heed. If I am not misinformed, you have bitter enemies amongst the Puritans. Some of those frenzied zealots would deem it a pious act to take your life."

"I have no fear of them," replied Buckingham, with a laugh. "But why do you gaze so hard at me, M. le Duc? Do you read aught in my countenance?"

"You will attain the highest point of your ambition, my lord, but —" And he hesitated.

"Fear not to tell me what you think," said Buckingham.

"You have the same look as my two royal masters," replied D'Epernon. "Be ever on your guard."

This remark produced an impression on Charles, but did not in the slightest degree disturb Buckingham's gaiety. Presently the discourse turned to other topics, and nothing more was thought of the warning.

D'Epernon departed early, and, on taking leave, expressed a hope that he should soon hear of the prince's safe arrival at Madrid, and that all proceeded according to his highness's desire. Accom-

panied by his escort, the duke then returned to his château.

"Those are two noble-looking personages, and seem to have a great career before them," he thought, as he rode along; "but both will be cut off early."

XVI.

What happened to the Travellers, and what they beheld, as they crossed the Great Landes.

As usual our travellers started at an early hour in the morning, attended as before by a couple of postilions.

Shortly after quitting the beautiful neighbourhood of Bordeaux, where the plains teemed with plenty, and the heights were covered with vines, they came upon those vast sandy plateaux known as the Great Landes.

No heath they had ever traversed in England appeared so wild and desolate as the apparently interminable waste on which they had now entered. Far as the eye could stretch spread out a vast monotonous plain, flat as the ocean when its waves are still, composed of ash-coloured sand, occasionally rising into little hillocks, covered with heath, stunted broom, and gorse, but without any other sign of vegetation, save that in the extreme distance there were dark lines indicating pine forests. The only

discernible road over this dreary waste was the causeway, which the cavalcade was now tracking; and even this was at intervals obliterated by the drifting sand, and could only be recovered by an experienced eye.

The most singular feature of the scene, and that which especially interested our travellers, was the fantastic appearance of the shepherds of the Landes, who looked like inhabitants of some other planet. Before the party had advanced far they noticed a sort of cabin, designated in the language of the country a *parc*, and looking like an enormous mushroom, supported in the centre by the trunk of a tree. Such as it was, this cabin, open to all the winds of heaven, afforded sufficient shelter to the shepherds of the Landes, who lead a nomad life. Near it were three or four herdsmen tending a flock of lean sheep, and a few equally lean cattle, though it was a marvel as to how the animals could obtain sufficient subsistence in that wilderness. The peasants were mounted on stilts, called in their patois *chanques*, which raised them a couple of yards from the ground. Over their shoulders they wore sheepskin cloaks, and berets on their heads, and each was provided with a long pole.

On seeing the travellers, the herdsmen started towards them, moving with gigantic strides, and were soon by the side of the troop. They easily

kept up with the horses, even though the latter were going at full speed. After accompanying the cavalcade for half a league, the peasants dropped off, and returned to their flocks.

As our travellers proceeded, and approached the tracts covered with pines, which flourish vigorously in this sandy soil, and yield a plentiful supply of resin, they found that whatever else the inhospitable region might want, it was by no means destitute of game. Rabbits and hares abounded, a roebuck was now and then descried, and the travellers, catching sight of a wild sow and her marcassins, were half tempted to pursue them. On the plains they saw bustards, in the lakes wild geese, and cranes amid the shallow pools. The marshes were frequented by bitterns, curlews, wild ducks, and coots, and from the pine forests arose clouds of wood-pigeons.

That there were also formidable animals to be encountered, was proved as the party went on. They had just passed a pine forest, and crossed a rude bridge thrown across a stream, the waters of which were black as ink, when they heard loud outcries, and, looking in the direction whence the shouts proceeded, perceived that a flock of sheep had been attacked by a pack of wolves. Three or four shepherds, aided by powerful dogs, were engaged in an unequal conflict with their fierce aggressors; but the wolves were too numerous for them, and had already

caused great havoc among the flock. Fortunately, the shepherds were kept by their stilts out of reach of the savage beasts.

Without a moment's hesitation the travellers dashed to the assistance of the shepherds, and, as soon as they were within pistol-shot, fired at the wolves, killing a couple of them, and wounding others. The rest of the pack, displaying their blood-stained fangs, turned fiercely on their assailants, but, ere they could come up, three more dropped by another discharge. Though their numbers were thus thinned, two of the largest and fiercest of the troop attacked Buckingham. From one of these he liberated himself with a stroke of his poniard, and the other was shot by Graham. Another was killed by Charles, and the rest took to flight, pursued by the shepherds and their hounds. This rout being accomplished in a very short space of time, our travellers turned to rejoin the postilions, who prudently awaited their return on the causeway.

Graham, however, had singled out a large wolf, and after a hot pursuit of some two or three hundred yards, succeeded in shooting the ferocious beast. This feat achieved, he dashed across the plain to join the others, who had already regained the causeway. Perceiving the course he was taking, the postilions called out to him, but not understanding the meaning of their cries, and pursuing his career,

he was suddenly engulphed in one of those treacherous sand-pits peculiar to the Landes, called in that region *mouvants*. These dangerous quagmires, concealed by a covering of sand supported by aquatic plants and dried on the surface, form traps from which escape is always difficult, and sometimes impossible.

On touching the sandy crust by which the pool was hidden, Graham's horse immediately sank above the shoulder. Luckily the postilions perceived what had occurred, and shouting to him to keep still, hurried to the scene of the disaster, and as soon as they came up, they directed him to dismount cautiously, and then to remain motionless for a few minutes, to allow the sand to settle. This he did; but he had scarcely complied with the injunction when the shepherds came to his assistance, and wading into the pool with their stilts, quickly extricated him from his perilous position. The horse was also dragged out of the quagmire by the exertions of the shepherds, and the travellers were enabled to proceed on their way.

For upwards of four hours they continued their journey through the Landes, changing horses at post-houses, which in several instances were only solitary inns, with large stables attached to them. Everywhere the aspect was the same; vast sandy plains, relieved only by black pine forests, marshes,

swamps, pools, and lakes, all of which abounded, as we have mentioned, with wild-fowl of every description. Cabins such as we have already described were frequently to be seen, but the hamlets and villages were composed of miserable habitations. Long before this the travellers had discerned the jagged and snowy peaks of the Pyrenees, and the horizon was now bounded by the long chain of these magnificent mountains.

As the travellers approached a village, which was somewhat larger and better built than any they had as yet beheld in the Landes, they heard the sound of bagpipes, and presently afterwards perceived a band of youths and maidens in holiday attire, decorated with ribands, and carrying bouquets in their hands. While moving along the troop executed a dance to the music of the pipes. Behind them came a large charette, drawn by oxen covered with white housings, and having their horns tied with ribands. In the charette was a pyramid formed of pieces of household furniture, on the top of which sat a middle-aged woman holding a distaff, while round the pile, and standing on the ledges of the cart, were grouped a number of comely damsels.

On inquiry, the travellers learnt that a marriage was about to take place on the following day, and that the bride's furniture was being conveyed in this

manner to her future dwelling. The old woman with the distaff was the bride's mother.

In the rear of the charette marched a little procession, headed by the curé of the village and the young couple whom he was so soon about to link together. A large concourse of villagers of both sexes, including many old people and children, made up the procession. All were dressed in their best, and decorated with ribands.

As the travellers moved out of the way to let the jocund train pass by, they were greeted with merry shouts and laughter from the youths and maidens.

No other incident worthy of note happened to the prince and his companions during their ride across the Landes. At Saint Vincent they left the sandy wastes behind them, and entered upon a fertile country.

It was growing dusk as they gained the heights overlooking Bayonne, but sufficient light was left to enable them to discern that strongly fortified town, situated near the junction of the Adour and the Nive.

Descending the hill, they quitted their horses at the faubourg Saint Esprit, and were ferried across both rivers, but were detained at the gates of the town for some time. At last, however, they were permitted to enter, and at once proceeded to an hôtellerie.

XVII.

How the Travellers were brought before the Governor of Bayonne.

THE party had just supped, and, wearied with their long day's journey, were about to retire to rest, when an officer, attended by half a dozen arquebusiers, was shown into their presence, and informed them that he was sent by M. le Comte de Grammont, the governor of Bayonne, to bring them immediately before him.

It being impossible to refuse compliance with the order, the whole party accompanied the officer, and were taken to the castle, which was situated in the upper part of the town, at no great distance from the hotel. After a brief detention in the guard-chamber, they were led across the inner court to the governor's apartments.

The Comte de Grammont was a haughty-looking personage, of middle age, and he glanced sternly at the travellers as they entered.

"You are Englishmen, messieurs," he said, "on your way to Spain. Is it not so?"

Charles replied in the affirmative, adding, "As we are pressed for time, monseigneur, we desire, with your permission, to start at an early hour to-morrow morning."

"I cannot allow you to do so," replied Grammont, coldly.

"You will perhaps condescend to inform us why we are detained, M. le Comte?" observed Buckingham, haughtily.

"As governor of this city, I have no explanation to render, monsieur," said Grammont. "I shall detain you till I am satisfied on certain points."

"Perhaps we may be able to satisfy you on those points now, monseigneur," remarked Cottington. "We are ready to answer any questions you may please to put to us."

"What is the object of your journey to Spain?" demanded Grammont.

"It cannot be publicly declared, and is not of a nature to interest you, monseigneur," replied Charles.

"Pardieu! I know not that," cried Grammont. "You may be engaged on a secret mission to Spain. You arrive here late in the evening, and propose to start at break of day. I suspect you, messieurs, and shall place you under arrest, and cause your luggage to be searched."

"I protest against such treatment, monseigneur," said Charles, "and I am of opinion that you will exceed your authority if you adopt any such harsh proceeding."

There was something in Charles's look and manner that made the governor hesitate in issuing the order.

"I do not desire to deal harshly with you," he

said, "but I must be satisfied. Have you no credentials to exhibit?"

"Only this letter, M. le Comte, from the Duc d'Epernon," replied Charles, producing it.

"A letter from D'Epernon!" exclaimed Grammont.

A marked change came over his countenance as he glanced at it, and respect amounting to deference took the place of his previous haughty manner. He immediately arose, and said:

"I am sorry this letter was not shown me before. All further inquiries are needless, and I have to express my profound regret that you should have been put to so much inconvenience."

"The inconvenience is nothing," returned Charles. "We are free, I presume, to start on our journey to-morrow morning?"

"At any hour you please," said Grammont. "But it would charm me," he added, "if you could be induced to rest a day at Bayonne. There is much in the town that merits inspection. However, I will not press you further. Reconduct these gentlemen to their hotel," he added to the officer, "and give orders to the guard at the Porte d'Espagne that the whole party be allowed to pass forth when they please to-morrow morning."

"It shall be done, monseigneur," replied the officer, respectfully.

The Comte de Grammont would fain have accompanied the party to the castle gate, but this Charles would not permit.

XVIII.

Jack and Tom cross the Bidassoa and enter Spain.

Bright and beautiful was the morning, and the sky deep and cloudless, as Charles and his companions quitted Bayonne by the Porte d'Espagne, and passed through the strong fortifications on that side of the town. After riding about a league, the travellers gained a height which commanded a glorious view. On the left was a portion of the vast chain of the Pyrenees, their snowy peaks glittering in the early sunbeams. On the right lay the Bay of Biscay, with its picturesque headlands and bays stretching out as far as Fontarabia. Behind lay Bayonne, and, seen from this point, the city, with its two fine rivers, its ramparts, forts, castle, and churches, presented a very picturesque appearance.

Spain being now in view, Charles's impatience would brook no delay, and, though he could have spent hours in the contemplation of the splendid prospect before him, he quickly gave the word to proceed, and the whole cavalcade was soon moving on at a rapid pace.

Ere long they approached the shores of the sea,

and at Bidart, with its charming little bay, entered the Basque country. They next mounted to Guétary, then descending again, kept close to the coast, charmed with the views it afforded, till they reached Saint Jean de Luz. Halting merely for a relay of horses at this place, they pursued their course to Urrugne.

On ascending a hill which formed a spur of the lower range of the Pyrenees, they beheld the Bidassoa, the stream dividing France and Spain. The sight of this river again roused Charles's impatience, and he dashed down the hill to Behobie, a small town on the right bank of the Bidassoa, and the last in France.

Here they were ferried across the river, which at this point boasts two little islands, on one of which the crafty Louis XI. held a conference with Henrique IV. of Castile, and on the other, only eight years prior to the date of our history, the ambassadors of France and Spain met to affiance Philip IV. of Spain to Isabella of France, and Louis XIII. to Anne of Austria. The latter isle, it is needless to say, had a special interest to Charles and Buckingham.

"Heaven be praised, I am at last in Spain!" exclaimed the prince, as he leaped ashore from the boat. "Though I am still far from the Infanta,

am in her own land, and amidst her own people, and the space between us shall speedily be cleared."

The horses and postilions were brought across in another ferry-boat, and as soon as they were landed, the whole party mounted, and galloped off on the left bank of the Bidassoa for Irun, which rose before them on a hill about half a league off. This distance was soon traversed, and Charles and Buckingham, for the first time, entered a Spanish town.

Here all seemed changed, and it was manifest, from the costume and aspect of the inhabitants, and from the appearance of the habitations, with their large balconies and awnings, that the travellers were in a very different country from that which they had left on the other side of the Bidassoa.

The party rode up at once to a posada, and here they were obliged to change the horses they had brought from Urrugne for a relay of mules. The postilions by whom they were attended were much more gaily attired than those of France, and, though small of stature, seemed full of life and activity. Before starting, excellent chocolate was served them by a dark-eyed doncella, whose jetty locks were gathered in a single thick tress behind her back.

Once more they were on their way, and proceeding at a good steady pace, for though the mules resolutely refused to gallop, they trotted faster than the horses. The travellers were now in a pictu-

resque country. Before them, at the extremity of a vast alluvial plain, stood Fontarabia, cresting an eminence overlooking a bay, while inland, on the mountain sides, were groves of mingled oak, chesnut, and walnut.

The cavalcade had passed through Renteria, and were approaching Passage, with its large dock, when they beheld a horseman, whom they took to be a courier, accompanied by a postilion, galloping towards them.

As the person came nearer, however, they perceived that it was young Walsingham Griesley, secretary to the Earl of Bristol, charged, no doubt, with despatches from his master to the King of England.

Griesley could scarcely believe his eyes when he beheld the prince and Buckingham, and they both laughed heartily at the astonishment depicted on his countenance.

"You did not expect to meet us on the way to Madrid, Griesley," cried Charles.

"In truth I did not, your highness," replied the secretary. "I am utterly astounded. But I can guess why you are going thither, and I heartily wish you success. Your highness, however, will find that matters are not so far advanced in regard to the match as you may have been led to expect. I know the purport of the despatches I am conveying to his

majesty from my lord of Bristol, and they speak of fresh difficulties which have been thrown in the way by the Conde Olivarez."

"Those difficulties will be easily overcome," cried Buckingham. "Your master allows himself to be duped, Griesley. Things will change when we appear at Madrid."

"I trust they may, my lord," replied the secretary, in a tone that showed he did not anticipate any such result.

"You must ride back with us to Saint Sebastian, Griesley," said Charles. "My lord of Buckingham and myself will add to your despatches to the king. I will also charge you with some messages to his majesty, which can be more easily conveyed by worth of mouth than by letter."

"I shall be proud to convey them, my gracious lord," replied Griesley. "I esteem myself singularly fortunate in meeting your highness and my lord marquis, as his majesty cannot fail to be pleased with the good tidings I shall be able to give him of you."

During the ride to Saint Sebastian, Charles and Buckingham had a long conversation with the secretary, and ascertained from him the nature of the difficulties that had arisen; but these they were both disposed to treat very lightly.

On arriving at Saint Sebastian, they put up at

the Parador de Postas, and the despatches being prepared, Griesley started once more on his journey.

After an hour's rest, our travellers pursued their way through a beautiful and romantic country to Tolosa, where they passed the night.

XIX.

The Gorge of Pancorbo.

Next morning the unwearied party started again. Several days of hard travel were still before them ere they could reach their destination, and their powers of endurance were likely to be tested to the utmost by rough roads and obstinate mules that threatened to dislocate their joints. However, they held on gallantly and unflinchingly. Through long valleys — by the side of rushing streams — up precipitous mountains — down steep and dangerous descents — across wide, dreary plains they went, frequently encountering bands of muleteers armed with trabucos, and conducting strings of gaily-caparisoned mules laden with heavy pack-saddles, but though hearing much of robbers, and occasionally meeting suspicious-looking personages in the mountain passes, they had hitherto escaped attack.

On the evening of the third day after quitting Bayonne they reached Miranda de Ebro, where they rested for the night, and proceeding next morning

through the valley of the Oroncillo, they entered the Gorge of Pancorbo, a gloomy ravine hemmed in on either side by mountains, and enclosed by rugged rocks, between which rushes the Oroncillo.

While the travellers were threading this savage pass, and gazing at the tremendous precipices that threatened to topple on their heads, they were startled by the report of fire-arms, evidently proceeding from the lower part of the gorge, which was concealed from view by a huge projecting rock.

"What mean those shots?" cried Graham, who was somewhat ahead of the party.

"Ladrones, señor caballero!" returned one of the postilions, crossing himself. "Saints preserve us, they are plundering some travellers, perhaps murdering them!"

Without a word more, Graham applied spurs to his mule, and rode on as fast as he could.

On passing the rock, which screened the lower part of the ravine from view, he beheld a spectacle that roused him to still greater exertion. About two hundred yards lower down, where the gorge was somewhat wider, though the rocks were still precipitous, the torrent was crossed by a picturesque wooden bridge, close beside which, on the opposite side of the stream, was a large travelling-carriage, surrounded by banditti, who were now actively engaged in rifling it of its contents.

The postilion and an old attendant had been shot, probably at the time when the report of fire-arms reached the ears of our travellers, and their bodies were lying on the ground near the carriage. The traces had been cut, and the mules removed to a little distance from the vehicle.

On the other side of the carriage, guarded by a couple of brigands, stood an old hidalgo, for such his appearance and attire proclaimed him. He had been wounded in the attack, and was binding a handkerchief round his arm. Graham's attention, however, was diverted from the hidalgo by loud shrieks from the bridge. Two ladies, who it appeared had escaped from the clutches of the brigands, and were flying across the bridge, had just been recaptured, and now made the rocks ring with their screams. One of them, who struggled violently with her captor, was young, beautiful, and richly dressed, and was, no doubt, the hidalgo's daughter. The other, who was much older, might be her duena. As Graham hurried on to the rescue of the affrighted ladies, both bandits discharged their pistols at him, but they were too much embarrassed by their captives to take good aim. Graham replied with better effect. Both robbers were hit by his shots. One of them rolled into the torrent, and the other released his prey and fled. Thus liberated, the ladies flew towards their preserver, and met him just as he

reached the foot of the bridge. The younger of the two, who was half wild with terror, with her dishevelled locks hanging about her shoulders, called out piteously,

"My father! my dear father! save him, señor! It is the Conde de Saldana."

"Your father shall soon be set free, señorita. My friends are at hand," said Graham, pointing to the advancing troop.

"Calm yourself, Doña Casilda," cried the dueña; "calm yourself, my child. The saints on whom we called for aid have brought this noble caballero to deliver us from a fate worse than death."

"Do not stay here, señorita," cried Graham. "You are exposed to danger. Take shelter behind yon rock. I will soon bring your father to you."

"Thanks! oh thanks, señor," exclaimed Doña Casilda, with a grateful glance at her preserver. And, accompanied by the dueña, she flew to the place of refuge which had been pointed out to her.

At the same moment the cavalcade came up.

Meantime, the brigands, alarmed by the appearance of such a force as the travellers presented, had seized their firelocks, and, rushing towards the bridge, seemed determined to prevent the cavalcade from crossing it. Fearing that mischief might occur to the prince, Graham besought him to hold back,

but Charles would not be stayed, and calling to the others to follow him, prepared at all hazards to drive the robbers from the bridge.

Fortunately at this moment shouts were heard farther down in the gorge, and a small detachment of musketeers was seen hurrying to the scene of action. At this sight, finding they would soon be outnumbered, and would also be attacked in rear and front, the brigands turned and fled, quickly disappearing among the rocks. So precipitate was their flight, that they were unable to take any of the booty with them.

Two of the band, however, aided by a black-visaged ruffian, who appeared from his air of command to be the captain, endeavoured to carry off the Conde de Saldana, probably hoping to obtain a large sum for his ransom. Seizing the old hidalgo by the arms, they tried to drag him off, while the captain, holding a poniard to his breast, threatened, with terrible oaths, to stab him to the heart if he resisted.

In this manner they succeeded in dragging him among the rocks, and might have got clear off with their prey, if Graham had not come to his assistance. Firing at the robber chief, and wounding the villain, Graham sprang from his mule and bounded up the rocks. The robbers did not await his approach, but, releasing the Conde de Saldana, made good their

retreat. Graham did not attempt to pursue them, neither did he bestow any thought on their leader, who was lying on a shelf of rock, but assisted the old hidalgo to descend.

By this time Charles and his companions had come up, and a few moments later the musketeers arrived on the spot, and after securing the wounded captain, and binding him hand and foot, they scrambled up the rocks in search of the rest of the band.

It appeared that these musketeers had just arrived at the village of Pancorbo, which lay at the end of the gorge, about a quarter of a league off, when the sound of fire-arms had brought them to the scene of attack.

As may well be supposed, the old hidalgo's first inquiries were for his daughter, and he was not kept long in suspense in regard to her safety. Impelled by curiosity, which was stronger than their fears, Doña Casilda and her dueña ventured from their place of refuge, and finding that the robbers had been driven off, they hurried across the bridge, and arrived at the spot where the carriage was left at the precise moment that the Conde de Saldana was brought there by Graham.

Uttering a cry of delight, Doña Casilda threw herself upon her father's neck, while the old hidalgo, in his delight at beholding her, forgot his wound and all that had befallen him. Not to inter-

rupt their meeting, Charles and his attendants moved away to a short distance.

"How have you been preserved, my child?" cried the old hidalgo, as he recovered from his emotion.

"Señora Engracia and myself were rescued by this gentleman," replied Doña Casilda, pointing to Graham.

"He also was my deliverer," said the Conde de Saldana. "Señor," he added to Graham, "may I ask to whom we are thus greatly indebted."

"I am Sir Richard Graham, an English gentleman, Señor Conde, and am on my way to Madrid," replied the young man.

"You have done me an incalculable service, Sir Richard," said the old hidalgo. "I rejoice to learn that you are travelling to Madrid. You will find a home, if you please, at the Casa Saldana. I will also introduce you to the court of our young king, Felipe IV. My daughter and myself are on our way to Madrid, and were posting from Miranda to Burgos when this attack occurred. Heaven be praised it is no worse!"

"But you are wounded, father!" cried Doña Casilda.

"It is but a trifling hurt," replied the hidalgo. "I will get it dressed by the barber-chirurgeon at

Pancorbo. These are your friends, Sir Richard?" he added, as Charles and Buckingham approached.

"Friends and compatriots," replied Graham.

The old hidalgo courteously saluted them, and thanked them warmly for the assistance they had rendered him. Though evidently much struck by the distinguished appearance of the prince and Buckingham, he forbore to inquire their names. He afterwards, however, told his daughter that he was confident they were persons of the highest rank.

The exertions of the whole party were now directed towards enabling the Conde de Saldana and his daughter to proceed on their journey. Luckily, the mules were uninjured, and they were speedily harnessed to the carriage by ropes. All the articles scattered about by the brigands were quickly collected together and replaced in the coffers, and everything being rearranged as well as circumstances permitted, the old hidalgo, with his daughter and the dueña, once more took their seats in the carriage. The place of the unlucky driver who had been shot by the brigands was supplied by one of the postilions in attendance upon our travellers, and all being settled at last, the whole party proceeded to Pancorbo — Charles and his companions forming an escort to the carriage.

At Pancorbo, the Conde de Saldana alighted to

have his wound dressed, and here our travellers took leave of him and his daughter, and pursued their journey to Burgos.

"We shall hope to see you on our arrival at Madrid, Don Ricardo," said Doña Casilda, as she bade adieu to Graham.

"I shall not fail to present myself, señorita," he replied. "But perhaps you may have forgotten me by that time."

"I am not so ungrateful," she said, fixing her magnificent black eyes somewhat reproachfully upon him. "Hasta la vista, señor!"

"Adios, señorita!"

XX.

How Sir Richard Graham met with an Adventure in the Cathedral of Burgos.

JUST at sunset the travellers approached Burgos. On quitting Pancorbo they had made the best of their way across broad plains, over steep and barren mountains, and through narrow valleys, obtaining fresh relays of mules at Briviesca, Rodilla, and Quintanapalla. At eventide, as we have said, they drew near the old capital of Old Castile.

From its associations with the renowned Cid Campéador, Burgos possessed strong interest for our romantic and chivalrous prince, and it was not

without emotion that he first caught sight of the twin spires of its incomparable cathedral.

Ere long, as he gained an eminence, the whole of the ancient and picturesque city rose before him — its old walls, its gates, its proud castle, its countless towers and steeples brought out in black relief against the glowing sky.

Above all these structures, like a giant amid a host of pigmies, domineered the gigantic cathedral. All the upper part of the fabric — the mighty roof, the noble central tower with its pinnacles, and the two exquisitely crocketed spires, of which we have just spoken, each springing to a height of three hundred feet — could now be clearly discerned.

Between the travellers and Burgos lay the Vega, a fair and fertile plain, richly wooded in the part adjacent to the city, and watered by the river Arlanzon, now crimsoned by the setting sun. Crowning a hill about half a league from the eminence on which the prince had halted to survey the scene, stood the Cartuja de Miraflores, a magnificent convent, built in the fifteenth century, in the purest Gothic style, and which had served as a mausoleum for the old monarchs of Castile.

Charles remained rapt in contemplation of this beautiful prospect, until the shades of night, which came on too quickly, shrouded it from his view. *Even in* the gloom he could distinguish the giant

mass of the cathedral, and the still shining Arlanzon flowing through the wooded Vega.

After traversing a bridge across the river, and passing through a lofty gateway, the cavalcade entered the city, and proceeded along several streets, the houses of which seemed of great antiquity, many of them being decorated with stone escutcheons, and curiously painted.

These streets were only lighted by lanterns hung in front of the shops, or by candles burning before some holy image. But there were plenty of people abroad — dames and damsels draped in mantillas, caballeros muffled in black cloaks, monks, priests, alguacils, officers of the Inquisition, barbers, soldiers, vagabond boys, and beggars without number. In the aspect and deportment of these people — beggars and boys included — the proud Castilian character was displayed. All had a grave, haughty air, and marched like hidalgos. Pride and poverty went hand in hand. A ragged cloak seemed to be accounted no disgrace to its wearer — at least, he did not appear ashamed of it. In the balconies of many of the houses parties of young persons were assembled, and the tinkling of guitars was frequenty heard.

The streets being narrow, and, moreover, encumbered by vehicles of various kinds and strings of mules, the progress of the cavalcade was neces-

sarily slow. At last they issued into a large plaza, on one side of which, hemmed in by inferior buildings, stood the cathedral, and thither, as soon as they had secured rooms at the parador, where they alighted, Charles and Buckingham immediately repaired, fortunately arriving in time to witness the solemnisation of evening mass.

Prepared as they were for a wondrous spectacle, the grand coup d'œil offered by the interior of the cathedral far surpassed any expectations they had formed of it, and struck them with reverential awe. Emerging from one of the aisles into the mighty nave, they stood still for a short time to contemplate the sublime picture. A large portion of the fane was plunged in gloom, but this obscurity added to the effect of such parts as could be distinguished. The twinkling tapers attached to the long line of pillars on either side, though only serving to make darkness visible in the aisles, cast sufficient light on the nave to disclose the numerous figures kneeling on the pavement. These devotees were for the most part women, who, even while reciting their prayers, never ceased to agitate their fans. All, without exception, wore mantillas, and were attired in black. Scattered amongst them were a few men in varied and picturesque costumes.

The grand altar at which the priests were officiating was a blaze of light, and the splendour of

this part of the scene was heightened by the surrounding gloom. The prince and Buckingham might have regretted that so many architectural beauties — so many exquisite sculptures and paintings — were hidden from their view; that the glories of the gorgeous painted windows were not called forth by external light, and the charming perspectives formed by the triple rows of pillars in the aisles were only imperfectly revealed; but, such as it was, the picture was perfect of its kind, and delighted them as much as if every detail had been fully revealed.

Moving slowly down the nave, ever and anon glancing between the pillars of the aisles at some lovely but dimly seen chapel, or pausing to gaze at a painting or statue that attracted their attention, the prince and his companion approached the choir, where the light afforded by the great altar-candles was sufficiently strong to enable them to discern the marvellous workmanship of the stalls, the superb retablo, with its spiral pillars and consummately beautiful statues, and overhead the glorious dome, storied with the arms of kings and archbishops — a dome which Philip II. pronounced to be so beautiful, "that it seemed the work of angels rather than the production of men."

Having examined all these marvels, so far as was practicable under the circumstances — the sacred

rites were then being performed at the high altar — the prince and Buckingham glided noiselessly away, and proceeded to the grand Gothic chapel, called the Capilla del Condestable — in itself a church — where they beheld a marvellous altar-screen and several tombs of extraordinary beauty — chief among the latter being the tomb of Don Pedro Hernandez de Velasco, constable of Castile, and founder of the chapel. They were next taken by a sacristan, who, seeing they were strangers, volunteered to act as their cicerone, to the chapter-house, where they saw, fastened against the wall, an old wooden coffer of great size, and strengthened by bands of iron, described by their conductor as "the Chest of the Cid."

The legend connected with this singular coffer was recounted to them by the sacristan, and was to the effect that the Cid, being in want of money, filled the chest with old armour, and then taking it to a wealthy Hebrew, represented to him that its contents were vessels of silver and gold, and demanded six hundred marks on the deposit, stipulating at the same time that the chest should not be opened till the loan was repaid. The Jew, who was either more credulous and confiding than the generality of his tribe, or had a profound respect for the Cid, accepted the conditions, and counted out the money. Whether the Cid performed his

part of the engagement the sacristan could not tell, but he held the stratagem not only to be perfectly justifiable, but praiseworthy. He would have told them other stories of the renowned Gothic warrior, whose name is the boast of Burgos, but they had heard enough, and returned to the body of the cathedral.

Vespers were just over, the great altar-candles were already extinguished, and the chanters and sub-chanters were closing the magnificent gilt iron gates of the choir. Still some light was afforded by the tapers, which were left burning before the shrines and against the ranges of columns on either side of the nave. A few devotees still lingered, as if resolved to remain to the latest moment.

Reluctant to quit the sacred fabric, with the wondrous beauty of which they were quite smitten, Charles and Buckingham were standing near the centre of the nave, gazing around, when they were joined by Graham.

"You are late, Dick," said Buckingham, in a low tone to him. "Mass is over."

"I know it. I have been here for some time — quite long enough to meet with an adventure," replied the other.

"An amorous adventure, of course," remarked Buckingham.

"Your lordship shall hear. I was standing near

the last pillar of yonder aisle, when a lady, while passing hastily by me, slipped a billet into my hands."

"Bah! she mistook you for her lover."

"Very likely," replied Graham. "But, at all events, here is the commencement of an adventure, if I choose to pursue it. I ought to tell your lordship that I had previously seen the lady kneeling before a statue of the Virgin in the Capilla de Santa Ana, and though her features were partly concealed by her envious mantilla, I could make out that she had an adorable countenance, and superb black eyes."

"Was she alone?" inquired Buckingham.

"An elderly dame was with her, whom I took to be her dueña," replied Graham.

"How is the billet addressed?" asked Buckingham.

"It bears no superscription, and I have not yet opened it," returned Graham.

While this conversation took place, two tall cavaliers, wrapped in black cloaks, issued from the aisle on the left, and stationed themselves at a little distance from the party, on whom they were evidently keeping watch.

Their manner quickly attracted Buckingham's attention, and he said to Graham,

"By my faith, Dick, your adventure is likely to

have an awkward termination. I'll be sworn that one of those scowling cavaliers, who look as if they would willingly cut your throat, is the lover of the lady from whom you received the billet. Give it him, and explain how you got it."

"Not I — unless he asks for it civilly," replied Graham.

"Well, do as you please. If you have to fight, I will stand by you. The prince is about to depart. Keep near us."

No part of the foregoing discourse had reached the ear of Charles, neither had he remarked the two cavaliers, who now followed them like shadows.

As the party passed out by a side portal, Buckingham observed to the prince,

"I must pray your highness to return to the parador alone. Graham and I have a word to say to yonder cavaliers."

"Who are they?" demanded Charles, noticing the two mysterious-looking personages for the first time.

"I know no more than your highness; but they have had the impertinence to follow us."

"Do not provoke a quarrel, Geordie," said the prince.

"Rest easy," replied Buckingham. "I have no such design. We will rejoin your highness very shortly."

Satisfied with this assurance, Charles quitted his attendants, and proceeded across the plaza towards the parador.

No sooner was he gone than the two cavaliers, who were standing at a little distance watching them, came up, and one of them, in accents of constrained courtesy, said to Graham,

"You have received a billet from a lady, señor. I must beg you to give it me, or I shall be forced to take it from you."

"Aha! you must be jesting, señor," rejoined Graham. "I value the billet too highly to surrender it."

"Voto á Dios! I *will* have it!" cried the other, no longer able to contain himself. "It was given to you by mistake, señor. It was intended for me."

"So you tell me, señor," rejoined Graham.

"I swear to you I speak the truth. I am a Castilian noble, señor, and my word has never yet been doubted."

"And I am an English gentleman, señor, and never yet brooked an affront," rejoined Graham. "I will not part with the letter unless you can make good your vaunt, and take it from me."

"Básta, señor!" said the cavalier. "Be pleased to follow me to a more retired spot."

"This is a very foolish affair, Dick," observed Buckingham, "and if any harm should come of it,

the prince will blame me. I cannot allow it to proceed."

"But I cannot now retreat with honour, my lord," rejoined Graham.

"I am waiting for you, señor," cried the cavalier, in a taunting tone.

"Before we consent to follow you, señor, we must know whither you would take us," interposed Buckingham.

"The place is close by, señor," returned the cavalier who had not hitherto spoken. "A couple of minutes will suffice to bring you to it."

"So far good," observed Buckingham. "We will give you ten minutes to adjust the affair."

"Five will suffice," cried the first cavalier, impatiently. "While we have been talking here the matter might have been settled."

"Vamos, señores, vamos!" rejoined Buckingham, haughtily.

XXI.

The Duke de Cea.

Closely followed by Buckingham and Graham, the two cavaliers marched across the enclosure, and passing through an open gateway, entered the cloisters of the cathedral. The ambulatory was plunged in gloom, so that it was impossible to discern the arched vaultings of the roof, enriched with exquisite

tracery, or the many beautiful monuments on the walls. At last the cavaliers came to an opening, where they awaited the arrival of the others, and then the whole party stepped forth into a large quadrangle, which appeared to be laid out as a garden, with a fountain in the centre. The Spaniards led the way along a gravel walk towards the fountain, which was splashing pleasantly on its marble basin, and, having reached a convenient spot, stood still. The cavalier who had challenged Graham then said:

"Here we can settle our quarrel, señor."

"It is too dark," cried Buckingham. "You will not be able to see each other's swords."

"That objection is easily disposed of," remarked the second cavalier, producing a dark lantern from beneath his cloak, and unmasking it.

"You seem prepared for the emergency, señor," observed Buckingham, in a jeering tone; "but perhaps this lantern was intended to light you to the fair señora."

"It may do so when it has served its present purpose," rejoined the first cavalier. "Hold the lantern, señor, I pray you. You shall not say that any unfair advantage has been taken of your friend. Do you use the capa, señor?" he added to Graham.

And on receiving an answer in the negative, he unfastened his own cloak, and instead of wrapping

it round his left arm — a mode of defence then ordinarily practised in Spain — flung it on the ground.

As he did this, Buckingham threw the light of the lantern full upon him, and a tall, slightly-proportioned, and extremely handsome young cavalier was revealed to view. The rich attire of this gallant youth, who could not be more than one-and-twenty, confirmed the assertion he had made as to his rank.

"By my troth, Dick, you have to do with a grandee," said Buckingham. "Harm him not, if you can help it."

"I never meant to hurt him," replied the other.

Meantime, Graham had followed the example of his antagonist, and divested himself of his cloak. Both drew their rapiers at the same moment, saluted, and beat the appeal, carefully watching each other by the light of the lantern, which Buckingham held aloft with a steady hand.

After a few rapid passes, productive of advantage to neither party, Graham, who was a consummate master of fence, felt satisfied that he could bring the conflict to an immediate close, and accordingly, parrying a thrust delivered by the fiery young Castilian noble, he advanced quickly, and before the other could recover, seized the hilt of his rapier with his left hand, and by a strong blow on the blade and a dexterous turn of the wrist, forced the weapon from his grasp.

With a formal bow, he then presented the rapier to his discomfited antagonist, saying:

"Here is your sword, señor, if you desire to renew the fight."

The young Castilian noble took the rapier thus courteously offered him, and immediately sheathed it.

"I should not be worthy of the name I bear if I could use my sword against one who has given me my life," he said. "I own myself fairly vanquished, señor."

"In that case, all hostility between us is at an end, noble señor," replied Graham. "Permit me to return you the billet which has led to this conflict," he added, taking the letter from his doublet and presenting it to the young nobleman. "You will see that it is unopened. I ought to apologise for having detained it, but ——"

"No more, señor — no more, I pray you," interrupted the other. "All apologies should come from me. I was to blame for making the demand so haughtily. You have behaved throughout like a gallant gentleman, and it will delight me to improve my acquaintance with you. I pray you to know me as the Duke de Cea, son of the Duke de Uzeda, and grandson of the Cardinal-Duke de Lerma. This is my friend, Don Antonio Guino."

"I am proud to learn that I have had the honour of crossing swords with the grandson of the great

Duke de Lerma, and himself, if I mistake not, a grandee of Spain," replied Graham, courteously returning the salutations addressed to him by the two Spaniards. "Your lordship, I am persuaded, will excuse me if, for the present, I must withhold my own name and that of my friend. I am compelled to do so for reasons the force of which you would recognise if they were mentioned to you. But I may state that we are connected with the English court."

"I am not surprised to hear it," replied De Cea, bowing; "and were I made acquainted with your titles, señores, I doubt not they would be familiar to me. The Conde de Gondomar, late ambassador to England, is my intimate friend, and has often spoken to me of the nobles of your court."

"The Conde de Gondomar is also my intimate friend, duke," said Buckingham; "and I hope to see him on my arrival at Madrid."

"Mil santos! a sudden light breaks upon me," cried the Duke de Cea. "And if I should be right in my conjecture, I shall esteem this meeting one of the most extraordinary events of my life. I am De Gondomar's friend, as I have stated, noble señores, and I believe he has few secrets — even state secrets — from me. I am aware, therefore, that he expects an illustrious personage in Madrid."

"I must set you right on one point, duke," re-

joined Buckingham, laughing. "I am not the illustrious personage you refer to, neither is this gentleman."

"But there was a third person with you just now," cried the Duke de Cea, "and he answers so completely to the description I have received from De Gondomar of a certain prince, that I could almost swear 'tis he."

"Without admitting you are right in your surmise, duke," rejoined Buckingham, "I may say that the person you imagine to be the prince desires only to be known as Don Carlos Estuardo. My friend here is Don Ricardo, and I am Don Jorge, at your lordship's service."

"I presume you do not stay long in Burgos, señores?" said De Cea.

"Merely for the night," returned Buckingham.

"I ask, because I have a proposition to make which I trust will not be disagreeable to you," pursued the young duke. "I have been brought to Burgos by the little love affair which you have discovered, but I depart to-morrow morning with my friend, Don Antonio Guino, for Lerma, the castle of my grandsire, the cardinal-duke. Lerma is about half a day's journey hence, and being on the direct road to Madrid, you must needs pass it. It will gratify me exceedingly if you will permit me to attend you thither, and furthermore allow me to present you to the cardinal-duke, who I am sure will

esteem himself highly honoured if you will pass the remainder of the day at his castle. Do not refuse my request, I beseech you, señores. It will be a kindness to an old banished minister, who, though he has fallen into unmerited disgrace, and has lost the power and influence he once enjoyed, without a hope of regaining it, still takes the deepest interest in all that concerns his royal master. Your visit will be a consolation to him."

"Thus preferred, it is impossible to refuse the invitation, my lord duke," replied Buckingham, "and I willingly accept it on the part of Don Carlos, who, I am sure, will be gratified to behold a minister so illustrious, as well by his noble actions as by his misfortunes, as the Cardinal-Duke de Lerma."

"It becomes me not to praise my grandsire, noble señor," replied the young duke, in a tone of profound emotion. "He has fallen, and there are few to praise him now. But I can say of him, with truth, that he served the late king, Philip III., faithfully and well. He filled the highest post in this kingdom, just as the Marquis of Buckingham fills the highest post in England; and though disgraced, he committed no act to forfeit his royal master's favour. His enemies triumphed over him. But he bears his reverses with dignity, and without a murmur, and is greater now than when in the plenitude of power."

"Your warmth does you honour, my lord," said Buckingham. "The great Duke of Lerma deserves all you have said of him. His acts as a minister are remembered in England, though they seem to be forgotten in the country which has so largely benefited by them."

"I shall not fail to repeat your words to my grandsire, noble señor," returned De Cea. "Your visit will give him new life, and recal him for a time to the world from which he has withdrawn. But I will not keep you longer here," he added, putting on his cloak. "With your permission, Don Antonio and myself will attend you to your hotel."

"Do not trouble yourself further about us," said Buckingham. "We can easily find our way to the parador where we are lodged."

"Nay, I must insist upon escorting you thither," said De Cea. "And I trust you will honour me by a presentation to Don Carlos."

Buckingham readily assenting, the whole party quitted the cloisters, animated by very different feelings from those which they had experienced on entering them, and made their way past the cathedral to the plaza in which the parador was situated.

Arrived there, Buckingham had a few words in private with Charles, and briefly explained what *had occurred*. The Duke de Cea and Don Antonio

were then presented to the prince, who received them both very graciously, and professed himself delighted at the prospect of beholding the Cardinal-Duke de Lerma on the morrow.

"I am infinitely obliged to you, my lord duke," he said, "for the opportunity you are good enough to afford me of beholding so distinguished a personage as your grandsire."

"You are too good, señor," returned De Cea, bowing low. "The obligation is entirely on my side."

Charles then pressed the duke and his friend to stay and sup with him, but they respectfully begged to be excused, and Buckingham came to the rescue, significantly observing, "Do not urge the duke further. I know he is better engaged."

"Nay, then I will say no more," remarked Charles, smiling. "Will it be agreeable to your lordship to start so early as eight o'clock to-morrow morning?"

"It will suit me perfectly," replied De Cea. "After matins, which I have promised to attend at the cathedral, I shall be perfectly free."

"Do not hurry yourself, duke," laughed Buckingham. "We will wait for you."

De Cea and Don Antonio then took their departure, and shortly afterwards Charles and his attendants sat down to supper.

XXII.

How the Duke de Cea made a Confidant of Don Ricardo.

At a very early hour next morning, Charles, accompanied by Buckingham and Graham, repaired to the cathedral.

The full beauties of the superb Gothic fane were now revealed to them — the tall twin spires cleaving their way towards heaven, the three exquisitely carved portals of the grand entrance, the triple-shafted aisles, the majestic nave, the vaulted roof, the numerous chapels with their monuments, statues, and paintings, the magnificent choir with its splendidly gilt gates, beautiful stalls, and glorious canopy — all these, and a thousand beauties more, were displayed to their ravished gaze. To complete their satisfaction, the grand notes of the organ were heard pealing along the roof, while sweet voices arose from the choir.

As on the previous evening, the pavement of the mighty nave was peopled with female devotees, all producing a singular and striking effect, from their black attire, their fans and mantillas; and many of them — the younger at least — boasting magnificent eyes, jet-black locks, and charming features. In the chapels also there were many worshippers; and though the hour was so early, the *cathedral* might be said to be thronged.

As Graham passed the chapel of Santa Ana he could not help casting a glance into it, and then perceived the beautiful creature he had seen there on the previous night. She was kneeling before the image of the Virgin, and not far from her stood the young Duke de Cea, so engrossed by the contemplation of his divinity, that he had eyes for no other object.

Charles remained within the cathedral for more than an hour, chiefly employing himself in examining the many marvellous paintings which he had been unable to inspect on the previous evening, and then, deeply deploring the necessity of departure, he bade adieu to the glorious pile, in which he would willingly have tarried during the whole of the day, and returned with his companions to the parador, where breakfast awaited them.

"I do not think the Duke de Cea will be punctual to his appointment, for I saw him in attendance upon a fair señora as we quitted the cathedral," observed Buckingham, helping himself to a cup of chocolate, which formed the staple of the frugal repast.

"I venture to differ with your lordship," said Graham. "It still wants a quarter to eight. In my opinion, he will be here at the hour agreed on."

Graham was right. Before the cathedral bell tolled eight, the Duke de Cea and Don Antonio,

each mounted on a superb Barbary horse, and attended by a couple of lacqueys in rich liveries, likewise well mounted and well armed, rode into the court of the parador.

As they alighted, Charles and Buckingham came forth to meet them, and naturally expressed admiration of their beautiful barbs.

"I am glad you like them," said the young duke. "Though full of fire, they are as easy to sit as a lady's palfrey, and might be reined by a silken thread. You will confer a favour upon me by accepting them."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Charles.

"Do not mortify me by a refusal, noble Don Carlos," cried De Cea. "Keep one yourself, and give the other to Don Jorge."

It was so evident that the generous young noble would have been deeply hurt by a refusal, that Charles could not say nay, but, mounting the barb proffered him, found that the noble animal had all the qualities ascribed to him. Buckingham required no further solicitation, but immediately vaulted into the saddle of the other Barbary courser, which was resigned to him by Don Antonio, and was enchanted with his acquisition.

At this moment a bevy of mules, ready saddled and bridled, was brought out, and as if to prove *the value* of De Cea's present, the vicious brutes

made a most horrible disturbance, kicking, squealing, shrieking; and biting furiously, like wild beasts. Some time elapsed before the refractory animals could be mounted. At last, however, amid a hurricane of imprecations from the postilions, the cracking of whips, and the shrill cries of the mules, whose tough leathern hides resounded with oft-repeated blows, the cavalcade got into motion, and made its way across the plaza, and along several narrow streets abounding in churches, convents, and ancient and picturesque habitations, and swarming with muleteers, priests, friars of various orders, and dark-eyed women draped in mantillas.

At the head of the company rode Charles, with the young Duke de Cea by his side, and the latter called the prince's attention to several remarkable structures as they passed along.

"'Tis a thousand pities you are obliged to quit Burgos without visiting the house of the Cid, and his tomb at the convent of San Pedro de Cardeña," observed the duke.

"Time is wanting," replied Charles. "I reverence the memory of the great Gothic hero, but I must be content with beholding the city wherein he dwelt, the proudest recollections of which will ever be associated with his name."

Making an exit from Burgos by the Arco de

Santa Maria, the troop traversed a bridge over the Arlanzon, and when half way across, the Duke de Cea called a momentary halt, and directed the prince's attention to the beautiful gate through which they had just passed, and which was decorated with statues of the Cid, Fernan Gonzalès, the Emperor Charles V., and other renowned personages.

From this bridge a magnificent view of the city was obtained, with its lordly castle and superb cathedral towering above the other structures. The twin spires and central tower of the splendid fane, now displayed in all their beauty, again excited the enthusiastic admiration of the travellers. It was with a sigh that Charles gave the word to the cavalcade to move on, and he more than once looked back at those marvellous spires, which continued in sight long after Burgos itself had disappeared.

The country on which they had now entered was bare and uninteresting; and consisted of parched-up plains, with scarcely an object on which the eye could dwell with pleasure, stony mountains, and miserable villages.

At the solitary venta of Madrigalejo, where they halted, they were treated with profound respect by the host, who, as soon as he beheld the Duke de Cea, proceeded to clear his house of a band of *muleteers* by whom it was invaded, and then be-

sought his more important guests to enter. Proceeding to the comedor, or dining-hall, they discovered on the table a puchero, a ragoût of rabbits, with a mess of boiled chickens and rice, and their ride having given them an appetite, they immediately fell to work on these viands, and in a short time very little was left for the muleteers, for whom the dishes were originally prepared. Having wound up their repast with a few flasks of excellent valdepeñas, they ordered their horses, and a relay of mules being brought out for those who required them, the party proceeded on their journey, much to the satisfaction of the muleteers.

Buckingham having now joined the prince at the head of the troop, the Duke de Cea fell back, and rode beside Graham. A friendship had already been established between these two young men, whose tastes proved to be perfectly congenial, and after they had conversed together for some time on indifferent topics, De Cea said to his new friend:

"I know you to be a man of honour, my dear Don Ricardo, and I will, therefore, unbosom myself to you, and give you some particulars of the love-affair in which I am engaged, and with which you have been so strangely mixed up. I need not describe the lady, for you have seen her, and know how lovely she is. Yes, Doña Flor is very beautiful," he added, with a passionate sigh. "I have

seen none to compare with her, unless it be her sister. The first moment I beheld her I fell desperately in love."

"I am not surprised at it, duke," remarked Graham. "Like myself, I perceive you are of an inflammable temperament."

"I have often been in love before, Don Ricardo, but this is a grand passion," said De Cea, with another sigh, "and threatens to consume me. I can think only of Doña Flor. I must tell you she is married — married to a grandee — Don Pompeo de Tarsis."

"I hope Don Pompeo is old," observed Graham.

"He is under thirty, and remarkably handsome," replied the duke; "but he has a dreadful temper, and Doña Flor detests him. Though perfectly aware of her dislike, he is foolish enough to be jealous."

"Apparently not without cause," remarked Graham. "Permit me to inquire whether Don Pompeo resides in Burgos or the neighbourhood?"

"He has a mansion in Burgos," replied De Cea. "But he lives chiefly in Madrid, or Valladolid, as he belongs to the court. He is in Madrid at this moment, and you are certain to see him on your arrival, for he is in great favour with the minister, the Conde de Olivarez."

"How comes it, if he is as jealous as you re-

present him, that he allows his wife to be alone in Burgos?" inquired Graham.

"She is under the care of a dueña, and an old servant, who are watchful as dragons," replied De Cea.

"But you have found out a way to put the dragons to sleep — eh, duke?"

"I have gained over the dueña, but not old Basilio. He is incorruptible," replied De Cea. "But, nevertheless, I have ventured to follow Doña Flor to Burgos, and in spite of Basilio's vigilance, by the aid of a rope-ladder have contrived to obtain more than one interview with her."

"But why quit Burgos, if she remains there?" asked Graham.

"It would be useless to stay. I could not see her again. To-day she expects the arrival of her father, the Conde de Saldana, who is travelling from Vittoria to Madrid."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Graham. "Then Doña Casilda is her sister."

"She is," replied De Cea, in equal surprise. "Is it possible that you know Doña Casilda?"

"You shall hear," said Graham. And he proceeded to recount his adventure with the bandits in the gorge of Pancorbo.

"By the black eyes of her I love, this is most strange and incredible!" exclaimed the young duke.

"You are a fortunate man, Don Ricardo. Doña Casilda cannot be ungrateful after the important service you have rendered her. But you must not lose time. I rather think her father has promised her hand to Don Christóbal de Gavina."

"Diablo!" exclaimed Graham, in a tone of vexation.

"Moreover, I cannot disguise from you that Don Christóbal is young, handsome, and rich — he has mines in Mexico — so you see you have a formidable rival. But do not despair, amigo. I know the impulsive nature of my countrywomen, how quickly they are captivated by gallantry and devotion, and I am certain that the courage you displayed in the encounter with the bandits must have produced a strong impression upon Doña Casilda's susceptible breast."

"But she may have already given her heart to Don Christóbal," said Graham, in a despondent tone.

"I don't think so," replied De Cea. "At all events, you will have the entrée of the Casa Saldana, and can see her as much as you please. The main difficulty will be with the old Conde. If he has promised her to Don Christóbal, he will not break his word. But, after all, love would be a very tame affair without a few difficulties and dangers. I should not be half as much enamoured

as I am of Doña Flor if there were no obstacles in the way."

"That may be very true, my dear duke," replied Graham, laughing, "and, to confess the truth, I did not know that Doña Casilda was so important to my happiness as I now find, since there is every probability of losing her."

"Courage! trust to me, and you shall not lose her," cried De Cea.

"Faith! you are a friend in need, my dear duke, and I thank my stars for throwing you in my way."

"Without me you might possibly fail, that I will allow, my dear Don Ricardo," said De Cea. "I know the manners of my country, which no stranger can perfectly comprehend. Nos otros Españoles are a strange people, as you will find, before you have lived amongst us long. I will lay you any wager you please that you will have less trouble with your suit than Don Carlos Estuardo will have with the Infanta."

"Think you so, duke?" cried Graham.

"I am certain of it," replied De Cea. "To say nothing of the difficulties of the negotiation which may possibly be overcome by the presence of Don Carlos, his patience will be worn out by the rigorous etiquette practised in our court, and to which he will be compelled to submit. Unless by stratagem

— and if he has recourse to it he will be in great personal peril, and will put half a dozen heads in jeopardy — he will never be able to obtain a private interview with his mistress. When they are together in public, she will be as cold to him as the ice of the Sierra Nevada. A princess of the royal blood of Spain is the slave of form. She is brought up in it, till it becomes part of her nature. She can only act, move, think, and talk, as etiquette prescribes. As jealously guarded as a Moorish princess, she cannot even stroll in the palace gardens unattended."

"'Sdeath! this will not suit Don Carlos," cried Graham. "He fondly persuades himself that he will pass the best part of each day in his mistress's society."

De Cea indulged in a hearty fit of laughter, and then said, "Dreams — dreams — mere poetical fancies, Don Ricardo. The first interview will dispel the illusion. There is nothing romantic — nothing tender — nothing exciting in a royal courtship in Spain. It is a stiff, formal, insipid — I may say, stupid affair. I will describe what will take place. Cold as a statue, and almost as inanimate, the Infanta will receive her ardent lover — for you say he is ardent — with a frigidity that will at once quell his passion. She will give him her hand to kiss, for that is permitted by etiquette. Etiquette will also allow her to reply — but only in studied terms

— to his impassioned address. Then she will become dumb — perfectly dumb — and will presently retire."

"Zounds! duke," cried Graham, "you do not draw a very attractive picture."

"It is not in the slightest degree over-coloured," said De Cea. "I have seen what I describe."

"But is the Infanta Maria really as cold and unimpassioned as you paint her?" asked Graham.

"I do not mean to affirm that. For aught I can tell, there may be a volcano beneath that crust of snow, but Don Carlos will never find it out until she becomes his bride. I hope he may get well through the ordeal. It is more than I could. Three days of such dull work would annihilate me."

"From what you say, duke, the Infanta Maria cannot resemble her sister, Anne of Austria, who is one of the most captivating creatures I ever beheld, and apparently ardent as captivating."

"Pardon me, amigo. The Infanta Maria exactly resembles her sister. Before her union with Louis XIII., the Infanta Ana was just as formal and precise as her younger sister. Her lovely eyes, now beaming with witchery, were then without lustre. Even after marriage, Louis complained of her coldness, and dismissed her old dueña, the Duchess de Villaquieras, and her camaréra mayor, Doña Luisa Osorio, both

of whom, from their intolerable formality, disgusted his majesty."

"From this you lead me to infer that an equal improvement will take place in the Infanta Maria," observed Graham. "A portrait I have seen of her by Velasquez, which is in the prince's possession, represents her as exceedingly beautiful. But the painter may have flattered."

"Velasquez has not flattered. The Infanta has a charming figure, if it were not too stiff; fine eyes, if she would but use them aright; bright golden tresses, though I prefer locks of a darker shade — such as belong to Doña Flor and Doña Casilda; a complexion dyed like a blush rose — a paler skin is more to my taste; full, ruddy lips, to which I make no objection; and teeth like two ranges of pearls."

"You raise my hopes, duke, which had been cast down by your previous description."

"If Don Carlos has patience, all will be well," observed De Cea, "but he must not imagine that he will meet with a tender reception from his mistress. She will scarcely accord him a smile. And if he should venture to squeeze her hand, she will effectually check the repetition of such an endearment. You must own that we bring up our princesses strictly in Spain, Don Ricardo, and take every care of them *before* marriage. They ought to make excellent

consorts — and perhaps they do. At all events, it is to be hoped that the future Queen of England will do credit to her governors and governesses."

At this juncture, Don Antonio, who had already begun to smoke, and had induced Cottington and Endymion Porter to follow his example, rode up and offered them cigars, or tobacco for cigarettes. As King James was not present to denounce the proceeding by a "counterblast," and as Charles did not share in his august father's ahhorrence of the fragrant weed, Graham gladly accepted the offer — so did De Cea, and so did the prince and Buckingham. Consequently, in a few minutes afterwards, the whole troop was smoking, since long before this the lacqueys and postilions had lighted their pipes; the latter, indeed, had begun to blow a cloud before they left the venta of Madrigalejo.

In this manner, and with discourse such as we have detailed, the party beguiled many a long league, until about mid-day they approached the vast and magnificent castle of Lerma.

XXIII.

How Don Carlos and Don Jorge visited the Cardinal-Duke de Lerma.

Built about twenty years before the period of our story, when its illustrious founder was the most important personage in Spain, and could never have

contemplated the reverses that subsequently befel him, the proud Castle of Lerma, from its magnitude, commanding position, and splendour, had an almost regal aspect, well suited to the residence of an omnipotent minister, but little in accord with the retreat of a disgraced favourite. The grandeur and haughty air of the pile looked like a mockery of its owner's fallen fortunes.

The stately structure occupied the brow of a hill rising from out a town belonging to the cardinal-duke, and from which he derived his title, and commanded extensive views over plains watered by the Arlanza. The whole country within view of the castle, and much beyond it, had once belonged to the Duke de Lerma, but the greater part of his vast possessions had been confiscated, and little more than a tithe of his princely revenues was left him. Still the castle was kept up with a splendour befitting the dignity of the cardinal-duke, and the number of his retinue was but little diminished.

Thus, when the cavalcade was conducted by the Duke de Cea through a lofty gateway, sculptured with the armorial bearings of the house of Roxas y Sandoval, into a spacious court, there issued forth a host of lacqueys in sumptuous liveries, headed by a very important-looking mayor-domo. These lacqueys assisted the travellers to dismount, and by *the time* they had done so a number of grooms

of the stable appeared, who took charge of the horses.

After a few words had passed between the Duke de Cea and the pompous mayor-domo, the latter made a profound bow to Charles and Buckingham, and then ushered the party into the castle, marching before them through a grand entrance-hall full of statues, up a splendid marble staircase, and along a corridor which led to another wing of the edifice, where the state bedrooms were situated.

On reaching this wing, the mayor-domo assigned splendid chambers, each having a couch placed in a deep alcove, to Charles and Buckingham, and other rooms scarcely less spacious to Graham and the others. The windows of these rooms looked out into a charming patio filled with orangetrees, and having a fountain in the centre.

Meanwhile, the Duke de Cea had disappeared, having gone to inform the cardinal-duke of the arrival of the visitors. As De Cea had anticipated, his grandsire was overjoyed by the announcement, and, almost with tears in his eyes, thanked him for the gratification he had procured him.

About an hour later, when the guests had refreshed themselves after their journey, and partaken of a collation, the mayor-domo entered, and, addressing Charles and Buckingham, said that his Eminence was impatient to behold them, and prayed

them to come to him, as he was unable to leave his room.

On this they both arose, and, attended by the Duke de Cea, followed the mayor-domo, who led them to a suite of apartments on the ground floor. When they had traversed a large audience-chamber, ornamented by portraits of the Emperor Charles V., Philip II., and his son, the late King of Spain, and where several persons were waiting for admission to his Eminence, all of whom bowed deferentially as they passed by, the door of an inner room was opened for them by an usher bearing a white wand, and they were introduced by this official into the presence of the fallen minister.

They found the cardinal-duke in a large library, the shelves of which were filled with magnificently-bound volumes. He was seated in an arm-chair near a table covered with books and papers, and his legs, enveloped in a mantle lined with miniver, were supported by a velvet footstool. Behind the chair in which he sat was placed a large screen. Two chaplains were with him at the time, but as the prince and the others entered, they bowed respectfully and withdrew. The usher also retired as soon as he had performed his office, and the cardinal-duke was left alone with his visitors and his grandson.

Though but the wreck of what he had been, the *once* superb Francisco de Roxas y Sandoval was

still a very striking-looking person. As Marquis de Denia, and equerry to the Infante Don Philip, in the days of Philip II. he was accounted the handsomest man of the court. His stately form was now bent, and he was almost deprived of the use of his lower limbs by gout, but he still possessed remarkable dignity of manner, and his features, though stamped by age, and bearing traces of care and suffering, were noble in expression. The outline of his face was as regular as it had been in youth. His pointed beard and moustaches were white as snow, but his brows were black and bushy, and gave great effect to the glances of his keen, penetrating eyes. He wore a scarlet cassock with a cape of miniver, and had a red silk calotte on his head. From his neck was suspended by a blue riband the cross of Santiago. Such was the personal appearance of this distinguished man. His manner combined dignity and affability in an uncommon degree, and may be described as at once courtly and captivating. He could not rise to receive his visitors, who were presented to him by the Duke de Cea, but apologised for the inattention, and besought them to be seated near him.

"Pardon me if I gaze on you too earnestly, prince," he said to Charles, "but I cannot take my eyes from your countenance. One of the chief wishes of my life is now gratified — gratified when least ex-

pected. I desired to behold you, and Heaven has granted my prayer. From the bottom of my heart I thank you for the visit. It is a proof of a generous nature that you do not neglect the unfortunate."

Charles having made a suitable reply to this address, the old man turned to Buckingham, and said, "To you, also, my lord marquis, I must express the great satisfaction I feel at seeing you beneath my roof. I cannot receive you as an equal, for you are in power, and I am not. But I am deeply sensible of the honour you confer upon me. I am the more touched by this visit, because I have reason to fear that it will give umbrage to the Conde de Olivarez, and through him to the king."

"The prince would not be deterred by any such consideration from visiting your Eminence — neither would I," rejoined Buckingham.

"I am infinitely beholden both to the prince and to yourself, my lord," said De Lerma. "But it will pain me if my apprehensions should prove correct. And now, prince," he continued, "suffer me to offer my tribute of admiration to the extraordinary gallantry you have displayed in this enterprise — a gallantry worthy of the best days of chivalry, and which, if there be any of the spirit left that used to animate our nation, must obtain its reward. The Infanta must appreciate a devotion without parallel since the age of knight-errantry. Our young king

cannot be insensible to the confidence placed in him, and must turn a deaf ear to the counsels of his minister, who alone has delayed the match. That you have adopted such a step bespeaks a courageous and noble heart. But you have done well. We Spaniards adore gallantry, and when the news of your arrival amongst us becomes known, it will excite universal enthusiasm. The whole people will hail you as the lover of their princess, and will demand with one voice that she be given to you."

"I sincerely trust your prediction may be fulfilled, lord cardinal," said Charles.

"Doubt it not, most noble prince," cried De Lerma, his pale and furrowed cheek flushing, and his eye kindling as he spoke. "I should blush for my country, and would forswear allegiance to my king, if it were not so. But Philip, though he has ill counsellors, has a noble heart, and will act rightly."

"He will, if the Conde de Olivarez will only let him," remarked De Cea.

"Throughout the negotiations we have distrusted Olivarez, my lord," said Buckingham.

"And with reason," rejoined De Lerma. "He is the sole obstacle I now discern, for the prince's gallant conduct will have removed all others. Oh! for one hour of my former greatness! The match should then be speedily brought about. Were I, as

I once was, the king's chief counsellor, I would say to him, 'Sire, the step taken by the Prince of Wales in coming to us in person, almost without escort, to claim his bride, must be met in a kindred spirit. Delays must be at an end. With or without a dispensation from the Pope, we must give him the Infanta.' And all Spain would ratify my decision."

"In the name of all Spain, I beg to express my entire concurrence in your Eminence's opinion," said his grandson. "The prince ought to have the Infanta, and *shall* have her, in spite of Olivarez."

"I would you were still in power, lord cardinal," said Charles.

"I could serve your highness, my king, and my country at the same time, if I were so," replied De Lerma.

"Few ministers have maintained their position so long as you, my lord," observed Buckingham.

"True, and at the moment when I deemed myself most secure I was stricken down," rejoined De Lerma. "I am as notable an instance of the instability of greatness as your own Cardinal Wolsey. The highest post of this realm was conferred upon me by Philip III., who reposed entire confidence in me, and committed the reins of government to my control. I was then absolute master of the destinies of the kingdom, and laboured zealously — and I *trust* well — for the glory of my sovereign and the

welfare of my country. I cannot reproach myself with any act of oppression or injustice. I distributed favours with a lavish hand, and sought to conciliate my numerous enemies by moderation and kindness. I could readily have freed myself of them by other means. Like your august and sagacious sire, prince, I sought to maintain peace, and succeeded in doing so during my lengthened term of power. Though the royal coffers needed replenishment, I exacted no heavy tributes, and enforced no intolerable imposts. Hence the people loved me — and some few, perchance, love me still."

"Many — very many!" cried his grandson.

"I hope so," rejoined the old man, "for I have striven to earn their love. I encouraged agriculture, too much neglected with us since the discovery of the New World, and gave rewards for successful industry. I reconciled the internal troubles of the kingdom, and my crowning triumph was the pacification of Aragon. I was then at the acme of my greatness. The wealth of Spain was at my disposal. No request of mine would have been refused by the king, and if it be a fault to enrich and aggrandise my family, I committed it. Lands and titles were pressed upon me by the king. I made my son a duke and a grandee of Spain. I also made his son, who stands before you, a duke and a grandee. I bestowed large possessions upon the Duke de Uzeda.

I did more, I earnestly recommended him to the king, who gave him a portion of the favour which he had hitherto bestowed exclusively on me. Alas! I found a traitor in my own son."

"Proceed no further with your story, I pray you, my lord," implored De Cea.

"Nay, I must speak out, Guzman, or my heart will burst," said the old man, with much emotion. "Be content. You have never forfeited my love. I have forgiven your father for the grievous wrongs he has done me, but I cannot forget them. Let me make an end. Like the great Emperor Charles V., I had ever contemplated passing the latter part of my days in religious seclusion, and being then in a position to ask a cardinalate from the See of Rome, I obtained the dignity. But this acquisition was made the means of causing a breach between me and the king, and finding my influence decline, my enemies rose up against me. At their head was the Duke de Uzeda — my treacherous son. He had undermined me with the king. My enemies prevailed. I was dismissed, and the Duke de Uzeda — I will call him son no more — succeeded to my post."

"I wonder not at your anger, my lord," remarked Charles.

"Thus much I could have borne, for I was tired *of the* world, but what followed was harder to bear,"

pursued the old man. "Dismissal was not enough. I might be recalled, and therefore my reputation must be blasted."

"But not by your son, my lord — not by your son?" cried Charles, indignantly.

The Duke de Cea would have interposed, but the cardinal-duke checked him.

"I will not be interrupted," he said, sternly and authoritatively. "I will finish my recital. Terrible accusations were brought against me, and I was even charged with poisoning the Queen Margarita. My secretary, Don Rodrigo de Calderon, was seized, imprisoned, tortured, and finally beheaded, and if my enemies had dared to strike the blow, I should have shared his fate."

"It was my father saved you," cried De Cea, throwing himself at his grandsire's feet. "Wrong him not by the thought that he desired your death. He averted the blow."

"Heaven alone knows the secrets of his heart. I cannot read them," said the cardinal-duke. "Be his offences towards me what they may, I have long since forgiven them, but I will never see him more."

"Oh! say not so, my lord," implored De Cea. "He longs to ask your forgiveness."

"I will never see him again — not even at the

last," rejoined De Lerma. "Rise, Guzman. I have no fault to find with you."

Both Charles and Buckingham were too deeply impressed with what they had heard to make any remark, and for some minutes there was a profound silence.

It was broken by the cardinal-duke, who, by a strong effort, recovered his calmness.

"I must entreat your highness to pardon me," he said, turning to the prince. "I have talked too much about myself and my misfortunes. But I thought it might interest you to hear the story of a fallen minister of Spain from his own lips. I do not attempt to defend myself, save from the foul and false accusations that have been brought against me. The acts of my administration speak for themselves. I have been justly punished for my pride and presumption, and humbly bow to the decrees of Heaven."

It was perfectly clear, from the tone in which the latter part of this speech was uttered, as well as from the old man's looks, that his professions of resignation were heartfelt, and consequently they produced a profound impression on his auditors.

"I did not expect such a lesson as I have received from you, my lord," said Charles. "I shall *lay to heart* the words that have fallen from you,

and try to profit by them. You have taught me how to behave under adversity."

"Heaven shield you from it, prince!" exclaimed the old man, fervently. "Heaven shield you! When you ascend the throne of England, may your reign be long, prosperous, and happy!"

"Your history is worth all the homilies I have heard preached against ambition, my lord," said Buckingham. "Be sure I shall not forget it."

"May it never be necessary for your lordship to recal it!" said De Lerma. "I have found comfort and consolation in religion, from which source alone they are to be derived. Your eyes are yet dazzled by power. But I know its nothingness."

Again there was a pause, for the solemnity of the old man's words impressed silence upon his hearers, and as they raised their eyes towards him, they perceived that his hands were clasped together, and from the movement of his lips they knew that he was silently praying.

When he had done, thinking he had intruded sufficiently long upon him, Charles rose to withdraw. De Lerma did not oppose the prince's departure, but said to him:

"My age and infirmities will not allow me to attend upon your highness as I desire. But I commit you to the care of my grandson, who will exercise the rites of hospitality towards you in my

behalf. Attend upon the prince, Guzman, and see that his highness lacks nothing."

Bowing reverently to the old man, Charles quitted the room with De Cea. Buckingham would have withdrawn at the same time, but De Lerma begged him to remain.

From the interview that ensued between them, Buckingham derived much valuable information respecting the court he was about to visit. In depicting the characters of the young king Philip IV. and of the Conde de Olivarez, De Lerma displayed an acuteness and power of observation that astonished his auditor, who rose with a very high estimate of the ex-minister's abilities.

"Beware of Olivarez," said the cardinal-duke. "He is my enemy, and because he is so, you may think I judge him harshly when I say he is treacherous and perfidious, but you will find I am right. He will feign to be your friend — distrust him. He will pretend to promote the match — but be sure that he is secretly opposed to it, and will prevent it if he can. If you can baffle him, you will carry your point; if not, the prince will have taken this journey in vain, and will go back without his bride."

"I shall not fail to profit by your Eminence's counsel," said Buckingham, rising. "I have trespassed too long on your time."

"Not so, my good lord," said the old man. "I never meddle now with state affairs, and indeed I had resolved never to do so again, but as I am sure this match will be advantageous to my country, and as Heaven has brought you and the prince before me, I should not be a true Spaniard if I did not aid you. Once more, be on your guard against Olivarez. He is as subtle and as deceitful as the enemy of mankind. I know him. With this caution I have done."

So saying, he rang a small silver bell, and the summons being immediately answered by the usher, Buckingham kissed the thin hand extended to him, and retired.

On inquiring for the Duke de Cea, Buckingham was conducted by the mayor-domo to a noble picture-gallery, where he found him with the prince and the rest of the party, who were examining the paintings by Ribera, Zurbaran, Antonio Moro, Juan de las Ruelas, and other masters of the Spanish school, that decorated the walls. A magnificent portrait, by Sanchez Coello, of De Lerma, taken when the duke was minister to Philip II., greatly interested the beholders. They could not help contrasting the tall and stately figure there represented, proud as Buckingham's own, with that of the bent and infirm old man whom they had just quitted.

When the party had sufficiently examined the treasures of the picture-gallery, they proceeded to the tennis-court, the stables, and the orange-garden, and lastly walked forth upon a noble terrace, commanding an extensive view of the plains watered by the river Arlanza. Here they strolled to and fro till summoned to dinner by the mayor-domo.

In the evening the whole party attended vespers in the beautiful and richly-decorated chapel of the castle. The cardinal-duke was present, having been carried thither in his chair. As he was brought out, at the conclusion of the service, Charles and Buckingham took leave of him, and received his benediction.

That night the prince and the marquis were lodged in a manner more suitable to their rank than they had been since they quitted New-Hall. The couches provided for them were so luxurious, so different from the hard beds to which they had been accustomed of late, that they were both unwilling to arise when called, according to arrangement, at an early hour.

Having partaken of a sumptuous breakfast, the whole party repaired to the court, where their horses and mules awaited them. The Duke de Cea and Don Antonio Guino insisted upon accompanying them as far as Aranda del Duero, and all the party *having* mounted, Charles and his attendants quitted,

with regret, the castle, where they had been so hospitably entertained.

XXIV.

El Cortejo.

THE morning was splendid, and gave an almost smiling aspect to the sterile plains they had to traverse. Having obtained fresh mules at Gumiel de Izan, they pursued their course, and at last reached Aranda, a picturesque-looking town, built on the banks of the renowned river Duero, and surrounded by vine-clad hills, one of which was crowned by a sanctuary dedicated to the Virgen de las Viñas.

Making their way through a narrow street running between overhanging houses, with large balconies, many of which were graced by darkeyed donzellas, they entered the market-place, which presented a curious spectacle, being crowded by country folk in quaint dresses.

Here they alighted at a posada, and after an hour's rest the prince and his attendants took leave of De Cea and Don Antonio.

"Adios, amigo," said De Cea to Graham, as the latter bade him farewell. "We shall meet again shortly in Madrid. If I should see Doña Casilda and the old Conde, you may rely on my zeal in your cause. Vaya usted con Dios!"

Quitting Aranda by a bridge over the Duero, the banks of which were fringed with trees, and tracking a long and pleasant avenue of Lombardy poplars, the travellers entered upon a tract of country which was little better than a desert. Very wearisome was the journey through this barren district, and Graham sadly missed the lively companionship of De Cea.

As evening came on they approached the Somosierra — a lofty and rugged cordillera separating the two Castiles. As these mountainous passes had an ill reputation, and the travellers had been warned by the Duke de Cea against crossing them at night, the party put up at Cerezo de Abajo, a village situated on an acclivity of the lower part of the sierra.

In the comedor of the venta at which they obtained accommodation, the travellers found a captain of arquebuzeros and his lieutenant, both handsome, active-looking young men, though small of stature.

The host took care to intimate that Captain Mendez and Lieutenant Roque, as he styled them, were engaged in clearing the mountain passes from robbers, and he recommended the travellers to obtain their escort on the morrow.

"The captain has a dozen mounted arque buzeros *with him*," he said, "and can see you safely across

the mountains, if he is so inclined. How say you, captain?" he added to Mendez. "Will you escort the caballeros?"

"Readily, if they desire it," replied the captain, courteously. "Command me, gentil caballero," he added, bowing to Charles. "Myself and my men are at your service."

"A thousand thanks, captain," replied Charles, "but we will not trouble you. We are well armed, and do not fear attack."

"Take my advice, and don't refuse a good offer, señor!" cried the host. "You may be well armed, but the salteadores won't give you a chance of fighting. They lie in ambush behind the rocks, and the first intimation you will receive of their presence will be a shower of bullets. Besides," he added, with a significant gesture, "El Cortejo is now in the mountains."

"El Cortejo! — who is he?" inquired the prince.

"If you meet him, you won't need to ask the question, señor," said the host. "Captain Mendez will tell you who he is."

"El Cortejo, señor, is a noted salteador," said Mendez. "He was once a caballero — some say a noble — and piques himself upon robbing like a gentleman. He has hitherto escaped me, but he won't do so long, for I have certain information that he is in the Somosierra."

"Ay, there is no doubt he is hereabouts," observed the host, with a sly look. "But don't make too sure of catching him, captain. El Cortejo is far too cunning to allow himself to be trapped."

"What will you say if I bring him here to-morrow night, patron?" remarked Lieutenant Roque, laughing, and slapping the host on the shoulder.

"I shall say you are a brave man, lieutenant," replied the host. "But you won't do it."

"Por las brazas de San Anton! but I will," cried Roque.

"Nay, if you swear it, I will believe you," said the host.

"I have changed my mind, captain, and will avail myself of your escort," said Charles.

"I do not press my services, señor," replied Mendez, "but I think you will be safer with me. You may chance to meet El Cortejo. He has spies in the village — perhaps in this very posada — and may be on the look-out for you. You start betimes to-morrow, I suppose?"

"Soon after six," returned Charles.

"Buen! my men shall be ready."

Meanwhile, supper had been set upon the table by a mozo, consisting of an olla podrida, flanked by a dish of garbanzos and bacon, an estofado of veal, fried sausages, chickens and rice, and a Montanches ham.

To these viands the travellers did ample justice, and before they rose from table they contrived, with the aid of Mendez and Roque, both of whom proved boon companions, to demolish a considerable number of flasks of delicious val-de-peñas — a wine which, the host stoutly asserted, never harmed any man, drink as much of it as he might.

"I shall not put thy assertion to the test, worthy host," said Charles, as he prepared to seek his chamber, while his companions followed his example.

"Buenas nóches, señores!" cried Captain Mendez, with a laugh. "Lieutenant Roque and I are going to have another bottle. Don't let any thoughts of El Cortejo disturb your slumbers."

Next morning, as Charles looked forth from his chamber window, he perceived a dozen men drawn up in the court-yard.

The prince thought they did not look much like archers, but then he was not familiar with the accoutrements of the Spanish soldiery. The troopers he looked upon were wrapped in long russet cloaks, and wore sombreros, and each man had a trabuco slung to his saddle-bow. Moreover, as one of them dismounted, Charles perceived that he had pistols in his belt. They were mounted on mules, but had in charge a couple of horses, ready saddled

and bridled, which evidently belonged to their leaders.

On descending to the comedor, the prince found Captain Mendez and Roque, and their frank and well-bred manner dissipated any suspicions which the appearance of the arquebuzeros had inspired.

"You will find my men badly equipped, seior," said Mendez. "But they are all brave fellows, and have seen good service."

By this time the rest of the party had assembled. Chocolate was then served by the mozo, and while Charles and the others were partaking of it, Captain Mendez said to his lieutenant,

"Let six of the men ride on slowly in advance. The others can follow us."

Roque went out at once to issue the order, and presently a trampling in the court announced that the troopers were setting out.

Shortly after the departure of the advanced guard, Charles and his companions proceeded to the court-yard, where they found their horses and mules in readiness for them. Captain Mendez was in raptures at the sight of the two barbs.

"I am a judge of horses, señor," he said to Charles, "and I vow to Heaven I never saw anything like these barbs. They are perfect beauties. I am not rich enough to offer to buy one of them,

as I know it to be worth three hundred doubloons, but I envy you the possession of such a treasure."

"Were you to offer me a thousand doubloons I could not sell you this barb, captain," cried Charles, as he vaulted into the saddle. "It was given me by the Duke de Cea."

"The duke must have a high regard for you, señor," remarked Mendez. "Your barb came from the same nobleman, I presume, señor?" he added to Buckingham.

Buckingham replied in the affirmative, and patted the arching neck of the fiery little animal.

"Cielo! what it is to be a duke!" exclaimed Mendez.

Shortly afterwards, the whole party having mounted, the cavalcade quitted the venta, and began to ascend the cordillera.

About a quarter of a league ahead, the advanced guard might be seen climbing the rugged mountain-side. Captain Mendez rode beside Charles and Buckingham. Then came Graham, with Cottington and Porter. These were followed by the postilions, while Lieutenant Roque, with the rest of the archers, brought up the rear.

In this way the troop, which, from its increased numbers, presented a very formidable appearance, proceeded for more than an hour. By this time they had mounted to a considerable height, though

they still seemed far from the summit of the sierra. The road was now hemmed in by rocks, and in many places seemed well fitted for a robber ambuscade. All at once, Charles, who a few moments before had been watching their progress, lost sight of the advanced guard, and asked Mendez what had become of them. The captain could not tell, but proposed to ride on quickly and ascertain, and invited Charles and Buckingham to accompany him. They complied, and the trio soon left the rest of the cavalcade at a considerable distance behind. Still nothing could be seen of the archers, nor was any answer returned to the repeated shouts of Captain Mendez.

"What the plague can have happened to them?" he cried. "They cannot have been captured by El Cortejo. Where the devil are you?" he vociferated.

"Here, captain," responded a voice from behind a rock close beside them.

"Soh! I have found you at last. 'Tis well! Show yourselves instantly!" cried Mendez.

At this injunction, and as if they had been waiting for a signal, the six arquebuzeros suddenly dashed from behind the rock, and with fierce imprecations and threats surrounded the prince and Buckingham, and presenting their trabucos at their *heads*, threatened to shoot them if they offered re-

istance. So far from attempting to check this movement, Captain Mendez drew aside to facilitate its accomplishment.

"Ha, villain!" exclaimed Charles, drawing a pistol and levelling it at Mendez, "thou hast duped us. But thou shalt pay for thy treachery with life."

So saying, he pulled the trigger, but no report followed.

Buckingham likewise tried to fire, but both his pistols snapped.

Mendez laughed loudly and derisively.

"Your pistols have been unloaded, señores," he said. "They will neither harm me nor my men. You are completely in my power. Possibly you guess who I am."

"I know you to be a robber," rejoined Charles.

"I am El Cortejo, señores," replied the captain, bowing.

After a moment's pause, to allow the announcement to produce due effect, he added, "No harm shall be done you — unless you resist; and in that case you will only have yourselves to blame. I have fallen in love with these charming barbs. You shall give them to me. Do so, and I promise you — palabra de honor, señores — that none of your effects shall be touched, and that neither you nor your companions shall be molested."

"What if we refuse?" demanded Charles, sternly.

"In that case," rejoined El Cortejo, changing his tone to one of menace, "I shall still have the barbs, and shall leave my men to deal with you as they think fit, and help themselves to the contents of your alfórjas."

"We had best accept the rascal's proposition, and give him the barbs," observed Buckingham to the prince. "We are caught in a trap."

"I must beg you to decide speedily, señores," said El Cortejo. "If you allow the rest of your party to come up, I shall not be able to prevent a conflict, and the result will be disastrous to you, for all your fire-arms have been cared for. Will you give me the barbs, or must I take them?"

"Nay, thou shalt have them," cried Buckingham. "And may the devil give thee joy of thy bargain! It cannot be helped. Resistance would be idle," he added, in an under tone, to Charles, who seemed unwilling to comply.

"You are right," murmured the prince; "but it is vexatious to be thus outwitted."

"Better part with the barbs than with our saddle-bags, and, mayhap, with our lives," returned Buckingham. "The knave has got us in his clutches. There is no escape."

"Is the bargain concluded, señores?" demanded El Cortejo, who had been watching them narrowly.

"I have already said so," rejoined Buckingham.

"A word more, and I have done," returned El Cortejo. "In half an hour we shall reach the summit of the mountain. Just before entering the village of Somosierra, there is a little chapel, dedicated to Nuestra Señora de las Nieves. Arrived there, you shall both dismount, and deliver me the barbs. Pledge me your word to do this, and no harm shall befal you."

Charles and Buckingham gave the required promise.

On this, El Cortejo ordered his men to lower their trabucos and fall back, and the injunction was instantly obeyed.

"Now, señores, I must beg you to ride on with me," he said.

As there was no help for it, the prince and Buckingham obeyed. The brigands followed, so as to cut off all communication between those in front and their friends. At last, after a toilsome ride of half an hour's duration, the summit of the mountain was attained, and ere long the miserable and bleak-looking village of Somosierra came in sight. At the outskirts of the village stood the little chapel mentioned by the robber chief.

On reaching this structure, El Cortejo came to a

halt. Whereupon, without a word being said to them, the prince and Buckingham dismounted, and gave him their bridles.

"You are men of honour, señores," he remarked, courteously. "I really am sorry to deprive you of these charming animals. I should be sorry, also, that you should think I had treated you unhandsomely. Such conduct is inconsistent with the character I try to sustain. I therefore offer you, in return for the barbs, my own horse and that of my lieutenant. They are not bad hackneys, and at all events are preferable to mules."

Though sorely annoyed, the prince and Buckingham could not help laughing at the proposition, and accepted it.

Just as El Cortejo had dismounted, and was in the act of delivering his horse to Charles, Graham rode up, and as he stared in astonishment at what was taking place, Buckingham said to him,

"Don Carlos and myself have just made an exchange with Captain Mendez, and have given him our barbs for his horses."

"The deuce you have!" exclaimed Graham, in dismay. "What on earth can have induced you to make such an arrangement? The captain is robbing you."

"I'm sure your friends won't say so, señor," *remarked El* Cortejo, with a laugh.

"No, no, we are perfectly content. Indeed, we esteem ourselves gainers by the transaction," said Charles, as he sprang on the back of the horse ceded to him by the robber chief.

The next moment, Lieutenant Roque joined the group, and at a word from El Cortejo surrendered his horse to Buckingham, and took possession of the barb. Cottington and Endymion Porter looked completely puzzled, but made no remark.

As soon as El Cortejo had mounted the beautiful barb consigned to him, he said to the prince and Buckingham,

"You will not need my escort farther, señores. There are no robbers on the other side of the Somosierra. Vayan ustedes con Dios."

So saying, he put himself at the head of his band, and, attended by Roque, rode back the way he had come.

"Deuce take me if I can understand it!" mentally ejaculated Graham, as he followed the prince and Buckingham towards the venta. "But I half suspect that the rascal who has just left us is El Cortejo."

XXV.

The Alcalde of Cabanillas.

During the halt of the troop at the venta of Somosierra an examination was made, by order of

Charles, of all the pistols and carbines, when it turned out that the whole of them had been unloaded. The cartridges in the bandoliers were likewise empty. No explanation of this alarming discovery was offered by the prince and Buckingham, who likewise maintained a profound silence as to what had passed between them and El Cortejo.

On quitting the village, the travellers skirted the snow-covered peaks, which formed the summit of the mountain; and here the cold was intense, but the temperature soon became milder as they descended the southern side of the cordillera. While pursuing their course they came upon a savage-looking pass, where many a murder had been perpetrated, as was shown by the numerous memorial crosses lining the road. However, they passed this "malo sîtio" without being attacked. At Buitrago they obtained a fresh relay of mules, and then pushed on to Cabanillas, a small village at the foot of the lesser mountain chain. Riding up to a venta, Charles inquired of the host, who was standing at the door talking to a couple of travellers, whether he could give them aught for dinner.

"Ay, that I can, your worship," replied the ventero, a fat, merry-looking little fellow. "I can give you as good a dinner as you will get between this and Madrid — an olla podrida, fried trout from *the river,* poached eggs, and a quisado of rabbit."

"That will do," said Charles. "Let us have the repast with all possible despatch, for we are in haste to proceed on our journey."

"I will order it at once, your worship," replied the ventero, rushing into the house.

As Charles and Buckingham dismounted and gave their horses to a groom, the two travellers, who had been examining the animals with great curiosity, followed the man to the stable.

Meanwhile, Charles and Buckingham, with their attendants, entered the venta and proceeded to the comedor, where they sat down, in anxious expectation of the repast. But more than half an hour elapsed and no dinner appeared, when a considerable bustle was heard outside, and the door was thrown open by the host, who, instead of bringing in the anxiously-expected olla podrida and fried trout, introduced a stout, consequential-looking personage, whom he announced as Don Timoteo del Molino, Alcalde de Cabanillas. The alcalde was attended by a couple of grim-looking alguacils, wearing long black cloaks, and provided with staves. Behind these officers came the two inquisitive travellers previously mentioned, while a number of muleteers, together with the whole household of the venta, male and female, filled up the background.

When the alcalde had got within a short distance of Charles and his companions, who arose to salute

him, he called out, "Don Melchior, and Don Geronimo, be pleased to step forward, and prefer your charge against these persons."

"We accuse them of having in their possession two horses, of which we have been robbed by the noted El Cortejo," replied Melchior. "We knew the animals the moment we clapped eyes upon them, but we did not venture to claim them till we had obtained your worship's aid."

"You did perfectly right," replied the alcalde. "Where and when were you robbed of the horses, señores?"

"Two days ago, your worship, between Robregordo and Somosierra," replied Geronimo. "Our belief is that all these persons are bandits. It is true they have the air of caballeros, but then your worship will bear in mind that El Cortejo affects the manners of a hidalgo, and that several of his band are reported to be ruined spendthrifts of good family."

"I have heard as much," said the alcalde. "Now, picaros, what account do you give of yourselves?" he added to Charles.

"We have no account whatever to give," returned the prince. "We readily admit that we had the horses in question from El Cortejo" — (this admission produced a great sensation, and after it had *subsided* the prince went on) — "but if these

gentlemen can prove their title to them, to your worship's satisfaction, they shall have them."

"Would you have me understand that your captain gave you the horses?" demanded the alcalde.

"El Cortejo was obliging enough to give them to us in exchange for a couple of barbs, each of which was worth a dozen such horses," replied Charles.

"Ha! then you mean to assert that you have been robbed by him?" said the alcalde.

"Not being in a condition to reject his terms, señor alcalde, we thought it best to comply with them," rejoined Charles.

"By San Lorenzo, such appears to be the ordinary practice of El Cortejo," cried Melchior. "He gave us a couple of mules in exchange for our horses."

"Very likely the mules were stolen," observed the alcalde.

"Your worship has hit the mark," cried an arriéro, pressing forward. "They were stolen from me. I have just discovered Capitana and Paquita in the stable, and the poor beasts knew me at once."

"Did you receive anything in exchange?" inquired the alcalde.

"Yes, your worship — a miserable donkey," replied the muleteer.

This reply caused much hilarity among the auditors.

"Holy mother! El Cortejo seems to be at the bottom of it all!" exclaimed the alcalde.

"He is the perpetrator of all the robberies in the Somosierra, your worship," observed the ventero.

"All these worthy and honourable persons appear to have been robbed by him," continued the alcalde. "I am at a loss how to settle the matter."

"I will show your worship how to settle it," said Charles. "Let the two gentlemen restore the mules to the arriéro, and they shall have their horses."

"Por nuestra Señora del Carmen! you have cut the knot of the difficulty, señor," cried the alcalde. "But I am afraid you won't get back your barbs."

"Not unless your worship can capture El Cortejo, and I fear there is little chance of that," rejoined Charles.

"Sooner or later I shall catch him, señor," rejoined the alcalde. "But it appears to me that this matter is at an end. I presume you are content, señores?" he added to Melchior and Geronimo.

"We have good reason to be so," they replied. "We are greatly beholden to these caballeros, and are sorry to have doubted them for a moment."

And, bowing to Charles and the others, they *quitted* the room.

"I will go and take possession of Capitana and Paquita," said the muleteer, following them.

The alcalde was likewise about to depart, but Charles begged him to stay and partake of their repast, and the worthy man readily complied. Accordingly, the grim-looking alguacils were dismissed, and the room being cleared of all intruders, an excellent dinner was soon afterwards placed upon the table, to which all the party did justice.

Just as they concluded, the ventero rushed into the room in a state of great excitement, exclaiming,

"You have been tricked, señores — shamefully tricked! — and so have I. What do you think? — nay, you will never guess, so I must e'en tell you — those two travellers, who styled themselves Don Melchior and Don Geronimo, are rogues and robbers, and so is the arriéro, Pablo."

"What is this you tell us, Tito?" cried the alcalde, starting up. "Why, you assured me they were honourable men."

"On my conscience, I believed them to be so, your worship," replied the ventero; "but I have found out my mistake, and it drives me mad to think I could have been so easily duped. They owe me three dueros for meat, wine, and lodging, and have gone off without paying a single cuarto."

"Have they carried off the horses and mules?" demanded Charles, laughing.

"Ay, plague take 'em! they have, señor," replied the host. "They have galloped off towards the Somosierra, and I hope to San Nicolas they may break their necks on the way. Their parting words to me were, 'Tell the caballeros we are gone to join our noble captain, El Cortejo.'"

"Let us after them, señores! — let us after them!" cried the alcalde. "Bring out your best mules, Tito! — bring out your best mules!"

"It is impossible we can accompany you, señor alcalde," replied Charles. "We must be in Madrid this evening. Obey his worship's order, good host, and bring out your best mules without delay — but they must be for us."

"Well, if you are obliged to depart, señores, no more need be said," observed the alcalde; "and I can only wish you a pleasant journey."

Shortly afterwards, the travellers had mounted their mules, and were making their way rapidly across the vast arid plain which lay between them and Madrid.

Their next halt was at Fuencarral, and some two hours later, just as evening was coming on, the walls and towers of Madrid could be distinguished.

Charles uttered an exclamation of joy at the *sight*, and his enthusiasm and satisfaction were

shared by the whole of the cavalcade. For some time no one had spoken, but now every tongue was let loose, and the flagging spirits and energies of the party seemed instantaneously to revive. The mules, too, appeared to participate in the general exhilaration, and, aware that their journey was nearly at an end, voluntarily quickened their pace, and soon brought their riders to the gates of the city.

A certain feeling of disappointment crossed Charles as he gazed at the reddish-coloured mud walls, garnished with Moorish-looking towers and minarets, that rose before him, and he almost involuntarily exclaimed, "Can this be Madrid?"

"Yes, this is Madrid, your highness," replied Cottington, who chanced to be near him; "but you must not judge of the city by its walls, any more than you would fruit by the husk."

"Were the walls ten times uglier than they are, they would be welcome to me as Mecca to the devout Mussulman!" cried Charles. "But let us not linger outside. The gate stands invitingly open. Follow me, gentlemen."

Having passed through the archway, the travellers found themselves in a park. A wide road running through it soon brought them to a woody valley, which lay between them and the city. At the bottom of the hollow, extending to some distance

on either hand, was a broad open space, wherein was collected a great concourse of well-dressed persons of both sexes, who were promenading to and fro as if in a mall. Cottington informed Charles that this pleasant spot was the Prado.

Though tempted to linger within the Prado, the travellers passed through the gay groups, and mounting the acclivity on the farther side of the woody valley, reached the opening of the splendid Calle de Alcala, which, at this part, might be justly styled a street of palaces.

"At last you are in the 'very noble and very loyal' city of Madrid, as Enrique IV. styled it," remarked Cottington to the prince. "The Madrileños say it is the only capital — solo Madrid es corte. Whether it deserves the distinction, your highness will determine hereafter. Shall we go on? The House of Seven Chimneys is hard by."

Proceeding for a short distance along the Calle de Alcala, the cavalcade, under the guidance of Cottington, diverged into a narrow street on the right, hemmed in by tall habitations, and eventually reached a small plaza, at the farther end of which was a large sombre-looking mansion, flanked on either side by high walls, evidently enclosing a garden. A feature in this house, which instantly attracted the attention of Charles, as well as of such of his attendants as had not previously seen the

structure, was its massive and singularly-shaped chimneys.

"Behold it!" cried Cottington, pointing to the mansion. "Behold the House of Seven Chimneys!"

"Let us count the chimneys, and make sure," cried Buckingham. "His majesty desired precise information on the subject. By Heaven! there are only six."

"Count again, my lord," rejoined Cottington, laughing. "Your eyes deceive you. There are certainly seven."

"No such thing!" exclaimed Buckingham, confidently. "I appeal to his highness and to all present whether I am not right. There are two stacks — and three chimneys in each stack. The house is improperly named."

"We are all of your lordship's opinion," cried those appealed to.

"The designation is perfectly correct," remarked Cottington. "I will back my assertion by any wager your lordship pleases."

"Where, then, is the seventh chimney?" cried Buckingham.

"It is just as visible as the others," returned Cottington.

"To you it may be, but plague take me if I can discern it!" cried Buckingham. "There must be witchcraft in the matter."

"I hope not," observed Charles, gravely. "Give us an explanation of the mystery, Sir Francis."

"That is easily done, your highness," replied Cottington. "It is there," he added, pointing to a cupola in the centre of the building.

A loud laugh, in which all but Buckingham joined, followed this explanation.

"Bah! that is not a chimney," cried the marquis, incredulously.

"Excuse me, my lord, it is the main chimney — la chimenea principal, as the Spaniards say," rejoined Cottington. "There is a curious story connected with that chimney."

"You must find another occasion to tell it, Sir Francis," observed Charles. "We will now enter the house."

"Rightly called, I maintain, — 'La Casa de las Siete Chimeneas,'" rejoined Cottington, determined to have the last word.

END OF THE FIRST BOOK.

BOOK II.

THE INFANTA MARIA.

I.

The Earl of Bristol.

WHILE Charles and his attendants were examining the outside of the House of Seven Chimneys, and questioning the propriety of its designation, two persons were seated in a large lofty room on the ground floor at the rear of the mansion.

They had not long returned from the Prado, and their talk was of no very serious or important matters, and chiefly referred to the persons they had met during their promenade. Both of them were very handsome-looking men of middle age, but so different in appearance that it was easy to tell at a glance that one was an Englishman and the other a Spaniard.

In age the Englishman might be about forty-three, and in addition to possessing a tall and graceful figure, and a noble and prepossessing countenance, lighted by keen grey eyes, he had an air of great distinction. His manners were polished and refined, and from his long residence in Madrid and constant intercourse with the court, he had contracted a gravity of look and deportment befitting a high-born and high-bred Castilian. His dark locks, which

were cut short, so as to display a well-shaped head and lofty brow, replete with intellect, were streaked with grey, but his pointed beard and moustaches were still black. His doublet and large trunk hose were of brown velvet, and his mantle of the same material. His throat was encircled by a stiffly-starched ruff, and by his side he wore a long rapier. We need scarcely say that this distinguished personage was the Earl of Bristol, then English ambassador extraordinary to the court of Madrid.

Endowed, as we have shown, with remarkable qualifications both of mind and body, John Digby, who was of an ancient Warwickshire family, and nearly connected with the unfortunate Sir Everard Digby, an actor in the Gunpowder Treason, was well qualified to shine at a court like that of James, where personal graces went for so much. Accordingly, when, after spending some years in foreign travel, young Digby was presented to the king, he was very graciously received, and bade fair to become chief favourite. Quickly appointed a gentleman of the privy chamber, knighted, and made a member of the council, Sir John Digby was sent as ambassador to Spain on two occasions — both of which missions he discharged in a very satisfactory manner. Subsequently he proceeded to Germany to negotiate terms of peace for the Elector Palatine, but though the embassy resulted in failure, its ill

success is to be attributed to James rather than his ambassador.

Some years prior to our story, the able and active diplomatist we are describing had been raised to the peerage as Lord Digby, and rewarded for his services by the castle and domains of Sherborne, of which Sir Walter Raleigh had been unjustly deprived; but to give éclat to his fourth and last mission to Madrid, the purpose of which was to treat with Philip IV., then newly come to the throne, for the hand of his sister, the Infanta Maria, he was created Earl of Bristol. On his arrival at the Spanish capital, Bristol, in conjunction with the resident ambassador, Sir Walter Aston, zealously addressed himself to the object of his mission, and, though he encountered numerous obstacles, sufficient progress was made to warrant him in believing that the match would be accomplished. Buckingham, as we have previously shown, hated Bristol, and it was with the design of robbing the ambassador of his anticipated triumph, that the favourite proposed the romantic journey to Madrid, described in the foregoing chapters.

We now come to the Spaniard, who was a much smaller man than Bristol, but well made and very handsome. His complexion was dark, his eyes of tha same hue, and his brows and hair jet black. A pointed beard completed the fine oval of his face.

His manner was fascinating, but an indefinable expression of cunning pervaded his features. His habiliments, cloak, pourpoint, and hose were of black velvet, and well became his graceful figure. Around his neck he wore the cross of Calatrava. This crafty personage was no other than Don Diego Sarmiento de Acuna, Conde de Gondomar, who had been for several years ambassador at the English court, and by his adroit flattery of the monarch, his bribes to the venal courtiers, and his great diplomatic skill, had been eminently successful in carrying out the purposes of his mission. Admitted to great familiarity by James, and able to approach him at his festive moments, when he was not entirely master of himself, Gondomar had frequently obtained important secrets from the unguarded king. Believing Gondomar to be devoted to his interests, Buckingham kept up a correspondence with him on his return to his own court. It will be remembered that a private despatch from Gondomar, urging Buckingham to bring the prince to Madrid, decided the favourite upon that course of action. Ostensibly, Gondomar was on excellent terms with Bristol, but he consorted with him chiefly for the purpose of reporting his proceedings to Buckingham.

"It is strange there are no despatches from England," remarked Bristol. "For three days I have looked impatiently for them, but none arrive. I

have had no answer to my letter of the 4th February, and yet it required an immediate response."

"No doubt King James cannot make up his royal mind, my lord," rejoined Gondomar. "We know he is vacillating in his policy."

"But he leaves me in a state of indecision which is very perplexing, and may be prejudicial to our interests," said Bristol. "I speak frankly to you, count, because I know you to be a staunch supporter of the match."

"I desire it as much as any Englishman can do — more so, perhaps," remarked Gondomar. "But there is no reason for uneasiness. The next intelligence you get from England will be satisfactory, depend upon it. Perhaps the courier may have been stopped in the mountains. El Cortejo and his band are in the Somosierra. The last courier from Paris, who arrived two days ago, was robbed of his letters. Your despatches may possibly be in El Cortejo's possession."

"This is a deplorable state of things, count," said Bristol — "really disgraceful to the country."

"It is bad enough, I admit," rejoined Gondomar, "but the evil cannot be remedied. We shall always, I fear, have salteadores in our sierras. No sooner is one band exterminated than another springs up. There have always been the Seven Boys of Ecija. If your despatches should not arrive to-night, I will

cause a detachment of arquebuzeros to be sent to the Somosierra."

"You are very good, count. His Most Catholic Majesty owes it to his subjects, and to such as enter his dominions, that the highways be kept clear."

"You forget, my lord, that I myself have been robbed on Shooter's Hill, within half an hour of London," replied Gondomar. "I see little difference between your highwaymen and our salteadores, except that the latter are the bolder villains. But let us change the subject. You were not at court to-day. The king noticed your absence, and spoke of it to the Conde-Duque."

"And what said Olivarez?" inquired Bristol, curiously.

"He could assign no cause, but promised to see your lordship to-morrow; so you may prepare for the visit."

"Heaven grant the despatch may arrive in the interim!" cried Bristol. "I am puzzled how to act."

At this moment the door opened, and a young man came in. This was Harry Jermyn, son of Sir Thomas Jermyn, and the ambassador's chief secretary,

"What news, Jermyn?" cried Bristol, eagerly. "Has the courier arrived? Have you got the despatch?"

"No, my lord," replied Jermyn, whose countenance wore a very singular expression, "but a gentleman is without who has ridden post from London."

"Ha! he may bring a letter, or a message from the king," cried Bristol. "Who is it, Jermyn?"

"He gave a very unpretending name, my lord," replied the young secretary, unable to repress a smile. "He calls himself Tom Smith."

"Tom Smith! 'Sdeath! how should I know him, when there are ten thousand Englishmen so called? Is he a gentleman?"

"He has the air of one, my lord," replied Jermyn.

"Well, admit him."

On this the Conde de Gondomar arose to depart. But Bristol stopped him.

"Stay, count, I pray you," he said. "Tarry at least till I ascertain whether this Tom Smith has any private message for me."

Meanwhile, Jermyn went to the door, and called to the person outside, who instantly marched into the room.

Totally unprepared for such an apparition, Bristol did not at first recognise the tall figure in travel-soiled habiliments, and funnel-topped boots covered with dust, as that of the magnificent Marquis of Buckingham; but as the so-called Tom Smith ad-

vanced, and came more within the light, the truth flashed upon the earl. Better prepared, Gondomar knew the marquis at once.

"My lord of Buckingham!" exclaimed Bristol, greatly astonished. "Do I indeed behold you?"

"Yes, I am here in person in Madrid, my lord, and only just arrived," replied Buckingham.

"You are heartily welcome," said Bristol. "This is a most unlooked-for pleasure. But Jermyn told me you had ridden post from London. Surely he must be wrong?"

"I have ridden every mile of the way, my lord, and I promise you I found it a devilish long journey," rejoined Buckingham.

"I dare say you did," said Gondomar, cordially saluting him. "I am glad you have got here safe and sound, and have escaped the bandits of the Somosierra."

"I can give the last news of them," replied Buckingham. "I have been robbed by El Cortejo. I did not lose much by him, though, and I must say he conducts his nefarious business like a gentleman."

"I have so many questions to ask your lordship, that I scarcely know where to begin," said Bristol; "but my first dutiful inquiries must be in regard to my liege lord the king, and our gracious prince. *How fare* they both?"

"Both well," replied Buckingham. "The king was in his wonted health when I took leave of him in Whitehall. And as to the prince — why he can speak for himself."

"What! is his highness here?" cried Bristol, in extremity of surprise.

"My brother Jack, who represents him, is in the ante-chamber," replied Buckingham.

"Heaven and earth! can it be? I am lost in wonder!" cried Bristol. "Why did you not tell me this before, my lord? I fly to his highness."

"Stay where you are," rejoined Buckingham. "I will summon him. Prithee come in, brother Jack," he added, calling at the door.

Charles forthwith entered the room. His habiliments and boots, like those of Buckingham, gave evidence of the long journey he had undergone; but his looks did not manifest much fatigue, and his deportment was as dignified as usual.

As he came in, Bristol and Gondomar instantly threw themselves at his feet, and expressed the liveliest satisfaction at beholding him. Thanking them for their welcome in the most gracious terms, Charles raised them, and said to Bristol, with a smile, "You did not expect to see me here, my lord?"

"In truth I did not, your highness," replied the earl. "I never dreamed of such an event. But the

unexpectedness of your arrival heightens my joy at beholding you."

"You can guess what brings me to Madrid — eh, my lord?" said Charles, with a glance at Gondomar.

"Your highness can have but one errand," replied Bristol, bowing low.

"Yes, the motive of your highness's journey is easily divined," remarked Gondomar. "The most chivalrous prince in Europa is come in person to claim his bride. Such an act of gallantry and courage, performed by a private gentleman, would excite our admiration — how much, then, must we be moved, when the caballero andante is heir to a throne!"

"Without taking too much credit to myself, count," said Charles, "I may say that the journey has been attended with some little peril, and with some obstructions, as I will hereafter recount to you. I have travelled from London incognito, under the simple name of Jack Smith, and my lord marquis here has played the part of my brother Tom. We have only been known by those names throughout the journey. Our escort has been slight, consisting merely of Cottington, Endymion Porter, and Dick Graham — all of whom are here. As you will naturally suppose, we have had some strange adven-

tures by the way, and, indeed, have courted them rather than shunned them."

"That I can readily believe," remarked Bristol.

"Twice or thrice we have fallen among robbers, and have even been taken for robbers ourselves," pursued Charles; "and to give you an idea of the horses and mules, good, bad, and detestable, that we have ridden, would be impossible. But, on the whole, we have had a merry time of it. Have we not, brother Tom?"

"The merriest three weeks I have ever known, brother Jack," replied Buckingham. "I am only sorry the journey is at an end."

"I cannot go quite so far as that," said Charles, "but I shall always look back to it with pleasure."

"There is only one thought that mars my delight at beholding your highness," remarked Bristol, somewhat gravely. "Forgive me if I venture to inquire whether this journey has been undertaken with your royal father's sanction?"

"That question, which should never have been asked, my lord," interposed Buckingham, haughtily, "is sufficiently answered by his highness's presence here — and by my presence."

"Make yourself quite easy, my good lord," said Charles, kindly, to Bristol. "I had his majesty's entire sanction for the journey. I have letters from

him to yourself, to Sir Walter Aston, and to the king."

"I am glad to receive that assurance from your highness's lips," rejoined Bristol. "Knowing your august father's tender love for you, I could scarcely conceive that he would allow you to incur such risks. I am sure he never consulted the council."

"His majesty felt it to be necessary for the success of his plans that the prince should repair to Madrid," observed Buckingham, with cold significance; "and, being certain that the journey would be opposed by the council, he kept it secret. To me, my lord, he entrusted the precious charge of his son."

"Am I to understand that his majesty is dissatisfied with my conduct?" said Bristol, in a tone that showed how much he was hurt.

"You will understand that henceforward the treaty is under my management," rejoined Buckingham, imperiously.

"Then I am superseded?" cried Bristol.

"You have a master," said Buckingham.

"A master in you, my lord — not so," rejoined Bristol, with equal haughtiness.

"In the prince," said Buckingham.

"I acknowledge his highness," said Bristol; "but you, my lord — never!"

"That remains to be seen," muttered Buckingham.

"A truce to this, my lords," said Charles. "Let not my arrival at Madrid be marked by a misunderstanding between you. You have been overhasty, Geordie. My royal father and myself fully appreciate your services, my good lord," he added to Bristol; "and it is from no distrust of your zeal, either on the king's part or my own, that I have come here. His majesty felt that my presence must bring the matter to a speedy issue. But I shall be guided by your advice."

Bristol bowed deeply, but was too much moved to make any other reply.

"Your highness may command me in every way," said Godomar to Charles. "I am an Englishman at heart, and will serve you as faithfully as one of your own subjects."

"I shall not hesitate to put your zeal to the test, count," rejoined Charles. "To-morrow you shall make known my arrival to Olivarez."

"It will surprise him as much as it has surprised me," observed Bristol.

"And perhaps be equally displeasing to him," muttered Buckingham.

"It will gratify me to obey your highness's commands," said Gondomar. "I will not venture to predict what will follow the announcement, but I am sure to-morrow will be a day of rejoicing, such as has rarely been witnessed, at our court. And to

one person whom I forbear to mention, the news of your arrival will be more welcome than words can tell."

"She ought to be the first to know it," cried Charles, eagerly. "Can it be so managed?"

"The task is difficult and dangerous; but I must prove my devotion to your highness, and I will," said Gondomar. "The Infanta shall know of your arrival to-night. Nay, more, you shall see her, if you are so minded."

"The grand object of my journey will then be accomplished," cried Charles, transported with delight.

"Ah! but you may not be able to exchange a word with her," said Gondomar. "Your highness must consent to be entirely under my control. The slightest imprudence on your part would destroy me. Ask my Lord Bristol, and he will tell you how rigorous are our notions of etiquette, and how great will be the hazard I shall incur."

"Most assuredly you will risk disgrace, count," rejoined Bristol. "Let me dissuade your highness from the step."

"The adventure is too much in accordance with my wishes to be resisted," said Charles. "I will consent to anything, count," he added to Gondomar, "provided I can obtain sight of the Infanta."

In that case you must accompany me to the palace," said Gondomar. "You need make no change in your attire. When there, I will find you a disguise. I engage that you shall see the Infanta, but I rely on your discretion."

"You may entirely rely upon it," rejoined Charles.

"We will go at once," cried Gondomar.

"Hold, prince!" cried Bristol, throwing himself upon his knees, and catching hold of Charles's cloak, "I entreat you not to take this rash step. The chances are a hundred to one that you are discovered, and if so, the treaty will be effectually broken. Besides causing a great scandal which can never be forgiven, you will inevitably bring disgrace and ruin on the Conde de Gondomar."

"Do not think of me, your highness," said Gondomar. "I am ready to go with you at all hazards. You have set us all such an example of courage and gallantry, that we are bound to imitate it. I shall be proud to play a small part in this romantic adventure."

"You will play a very important part in it, if you bring me to her I love," said Charles.

"Listen to me, prince, I implore you!" cried Bristol, earnestly. "Do not despise my counsels, or you will repent it."

At this moment Buckingham approached the prince on the other side, and whispered in his ear, "Go!"

"I mean to do so," replied Charles, in the same tone. "Rise, my good lord," he added to Bristol. "I know that your advice is well meant, but I cannot follow it. You make no allowance for a lover's impatience. An opportunity presents itself to me of seeing the Infanta — think you I will neglect it?"

"My lord of Buckingham, I must appeal to you for aid, said Bristol, earnestly. "The prince has been entrusted to your charge by your sovereign master. You have the greatest influence with his highness. Exert it now, and prevent this rash step."

"I am not disposed to regard the matter in the same serious light as yourself, my lord," replied Buckingham, indifferently. "Besides, the prince is a knight-errant."

"You will be answerable for any ill consequences that may ensue," said Bristol, sternly.

"I am content to bear the responsibility," returned Buckingham, throwing himself with an air of great nonchalance into a chair.

"Good night, my lords," cried Charles. "We shall meet early in the morning."

"Long ere that, I trust," said Bristol. "Think not I shall retire to rest till I know that your highness has safely returned."

"I am perfectly easy," laughed Buckingham. "I know that Gondomar will take good care of your highness, and I shall, therefore, go to bed as soon as I have supped. Buena fortuna!"

Charles and Gondomar then prepared to quit the room, but Bristol stopped them.

"Hold a moment!" he cried. "Since your highness is resolved to go in spite of my remonstrances, I pray you to leave the house privately, so that none may know of your departure. I will make some excuse to your attendants, and give them to understand you have retired to rest. It is of the last consequence that your visit to the palace be kept secret."

"There your lordship is perfectly right," said Gondomar. "Every precaution should be taken to ensure secrecy. The visit must not even be suspected."

"To guard against that risk," said Bristol, "do you, count, pass forth as is your wont, and when you are out of the house repair to the garden gate, where I will bring his highness presently. You know the place?"

"Perfectly," replied Gondomar.

And with a significant glance at Buckingham, he quitted the room.

As soon as he was gone, the Earl of Bristol opened a window which communicated by a short flight of steps with the garden. Descending by this outlet, the prince gained a broad gravel walk, bordered by a parterre, adorned with oleanders, myrtles, and other flowering and fragrant shrubs. The garden was of considerable extent, and appeared to be charmingly laid out in the formal taste of the period, with clipped alleys and beds of flowers, and boasted some tall cypresses, and two extraordinarily large mulberry-trees, which are even now in existence. The night was calm, the stars shone brightly in the deep blue heavens, the moon was in her first quarter, and hung like a crescent on high. All was hushed in repose, and the silence was only broken by the nightingales amid the trees. Viewed from the garden, whence its full size could be discerned, the mansion presented a very imposing appearance.

"You are well lodged here, my lord," said Charles, looking back at the house.

"I have no cause for complaint," said Bristol. "There is a good garden, as you see; and though the House of Seven Chimneys is not so large as York House," he added to Buckingham, who had come out with them, "it is large enough for me."

"Are there seven chimneys, my lord?" cried Buckingham. "I doubt it, for I have counted them."

"Most certainly there are," replied Bristol. "It is no misnomer. I will convince you of the fact to-morrow. Your lordship is not the only person puzzled by it. Originally there were only six chimneys, but a seventh was built in jest."

"Under what circumstances?" demanded Charles.

"Your highness shall hear when you have leisure to listen to the story," replied Bristol. "We are now at the gate."

With this, he unlocked the door. Posted on the other side of it they found Gondomar.

"Your highness can come forth," said the latter. "The coast is quite clear."

"Take the key with you," said Bristol, delivering it to the prince. "Return this way. I will be on the watch for you. I shall not know a moment's peace till I behold you again. Heaven guard your highness!"

Charles then passed out, and having secured the door, accompanied Gondomar along a narrow lane running between high walls, the outer of which skirted the convent of San Geronimo.

On reaching the plazuela, in front of the House of Seven Chimneys, they found Gondomar's coach, and, immediately entering it, were driven along

the Calle de Alcala and the Calle Mayor, to the grand plaza, in which stood the royal palace.

II.

Of the Meeting between Charles and the Infanta Maria.

The old Palacio Real of Madrid, to which our story refers, must not be confounded with the existing palace, which, comparatively speaking, is a modern building, being only completed about a hundred years ago. The ancient structure was, in fact, the Moorish Alcazar, and had been the abode of the Caliphs till they were driven from New Castile to Granada. It was first occupied as a palace by Enrique IV., towards the close of the fifteenth century, but few changes were made in it till the time of Charles V., when the pile was partially rebuilt and enlarged, and its original character materially destroyed. Philip II. may be said to be the first Christian monarch who dwelt within the Alcazar of Madrid, for until the completion of the Escorial, in 1584, he made it his chief residence. Not till the reign of this gloomy monarch did Madrid itself become the capital of Spain, and from the same epoch must be dated the importance of the city. Few changes were made in the Alcazar by Philip III., who was perfectly content with the *palace* bequeathed to him by his illustrious sire;

and Philip IV. had as yet been too short a time on the throne to attempt any improvements. Though heterogeneous in its architecture, and certainly not so beautiful as it had been in the days of its Moslem rulers, the royal palace of Madrid was a vast and magnificent pile, occupying a most commanding position on the heights overlooking the valley of the Manzanares. Immediately beneath the royal edifice, extending from the foot of the eminence on which it stood to the banks of the river, was the Campo del Moro, part of which was laid out as gardens.

Viewed either from the grand plaza, from the valley, or from afar, the palace presented a most striking and picturesque appearance. It was entered by two Moorish gates, the beautiful architecture of which was happily undisfigured, and the buildings surrounding the spacious court were studded with cupolas and minarets. Above these towered the ancient keep, with its zig-zag battlements and turrets at each angle. Besides a number of small courts, the palace comprehended a superb patio, surrounded by apartments, laid out in the Arabian style. Such were the principal features of the Alcazar, as it was still generally called. Opportunities of examining it more in detail will occur as we proceed.

The coach of the Conde Gondomar was instantly admitted into the outer court of the palace by the

warders stationed at the gate. In this court several carriages were drawn up, and the place was crowded with lacqueys in magnificent liveries, grooms of the stable, arquebusiers, alabarderos, and footmen holding torches that cast a ruddy glare on the walls. On alighting, Gondomar and the prince entered the palace by the grand portal, in front of which a guard was stationed; but instead of mounting the grand staircase, they passed through a door at the rear of the spacious vestibule. Charles now found himself in a long passage, dimly lighted by lamps hung at distant intervals. Evidently communicating with the apartments of the various subordinate officers of the royal household, this passage brought them to a back staircase, mounting which, they came to an upper corridor, containing the lodgings of the meninos, or pages, appointed to attend upon the queen and the Infanta. This corridor was lighted in the same manner as that on the ground floor, and as Gondomar traversed it, he counted the doors on the right hand, and stopping at the ninth, opened it. The room was vacant, but a lamp was burning on the table, and the noise caused by their entrance brought out from the inner room a tall, handsome young man, attired in a doublet and mantle of orange-coloured satin, embroidered with gold. The menino — for such he was — expressed his surprise by his *looks*, but he made no remark.

"I want you to do me a service, Pepe," said Gondomar.

"Your lordship has only to command me," replied the menino, bowing.

"It is a very simple matter, and will give you no trouble," said Gondomar. "All I wish you to do is to lend this caballero a dress."

"With the greatest pleasure," returned Pepe. "Pray step this way, señor, and you shall choose one for yourself."

"Hold a moment, Pepe," said Gondomar. "You ought to understand that the caballero means to personate you."

"Personate me!" exclaimed Pepe, in alarm. "That is quite another affair. Your lordship must excuse me. I don't like it. I shall have to bear the blame of any indiscretion the caballero may commit."

"Give yourself no uneasiness, Pepe," said Gondomar. "The caballero has the strongest motives for caution. Equip him in your newest suit. You shall have it back in an hour."

"In spite of these assurances, my mind misgives me," said Pepe. "But I am under too many obligations to your lordship to refuse. Come with me, señor."

And he took Charles into the inner room, from which, in a short space of time, the prince emerged,

attired in garments of orange-coloured satin, like the menino. The habiliments might have been made for him, so well did they fit.

"Bravo! This will do admirably!" cried Gondomar, on beholding him.

"Yes, the caballero makes a very handsome page," said Pepe; "but let him keep clear of the other meninos and ushers, or he will assuredly be detected."

"Never fear," rejoined Gondomar. "Await our return."

So saying, he quitted the room with Charles.

From the corridor the count and the newly-made page proceeded through a variety of passages, up and down staircases, until they came to a superb suite of rooms, the windows of which, Gondomar informed his companion, overlooked the valley of the Manzanares. All these were lighted up, but there was no company within them, only a few attendants standing near the open doors, who bowed respectfully as Gondomar passed on.

At length the count and his companion came to a grand saloon, at the door of which two gentlemen ushers, bearing wands, were stationed. Only the central chandelier was lighted, so that the two extremities of the vast hall were, comparatively speaking, buried in gloom. A concert was going *forward in* this part of the saloon, and Charles

learnt from his conductor that the chief performers at it were members of the royal family. Surrounded by meninos and meninas, intermingled with a few courtiers and ladies of rank, all standing, sat, near a table on which some musical instruments were placed, the young King of Spain, with his youthful and lovely queen, his two brothers, the Infantes Don Carlos and the Cardinal Don Fernando, both of whom were mere boys, and the peerless damsel, whom Charles had travelled so far to behold — the Infanta Maria. There she sat in the midst of the group, the object towards which all eyes were turned, for she had just taken up a mandoline, and was about to sing.

Gondomar and Charles, who had noiselessly advanced to a short distance within the saloon, stood still, and the prince, who was enraptured at the sight of the Infanta, held his breath to listen.

After a brief prelude she began. Her song was one of those romantic ballads which breathe of love and chivalry, and told how a Spanish maiden was carried off by a Moor, and after long captivity was delivered by her knightly lover. The utmost effect possible was given to the words and Charles was alternately melted by tenderness, moved to pity, and roused to martial enthusiasm. The singer's voice was exquisite, and the prince felt a void in his breast when the sweet notes ceased. Perhaps if she had

known whose ears were drinking in those melodious sounds, she could not have produced them.

This ballad closed the concert, and when it was over the royal party fell into conversation. Counselling the prince to remain where he was, Gondomar stepped forward, and, after making a reverence to the king and queen, entered into conversation with the Infanta.

Charles was now able to study the features of his mistress, and as he looked at her his admiration increased. The Infanta Maria was just seventeen, and her charms were well calculated to inflame the prince. She possessed the same slight symmetrical figure as her sister, Anne of Austria, and if they had been together it would have been difficult to decide which of the two was the most beautiful. Maria had tender blue eyes, soft and deep as summer skies, beautifully pencilled eyebrows, a ravishingly fair complexion, full lips that blushed like coral, and teeth like pearls. Her face was oval in form, and her features charming, though not classically moulded. Her tresses were of a light golden hue. Their sole ornament on the present occasion was an oleander flower, placed at the side of the head. Her attire was of black velvet, embroidered with gold, which set off the dazzling fairness of her skin. Lovely as she was, it was evident that in another year she *would* be lovelier still. Her manner was graceful

and captivating, and had none of the coldness and reserve that Charles expected. He forgot that he saw her when she was entirely unrestrained by etiquette.

When Charles could remove his gaze from the Infanta, he turned to the young King of Spain, whose features strongly resembled those of his sister. Philip had a very youthful appearance — indeed, he was under twenty — and this juvenile look was heightened by a slight graceful figure, blonde locks, large blue eyes, a complexion of almost feminine delicacy, and small hands and feet that even an Andalusian dame might have envied. His features were well formed, but his visage was somewhat long, and he had the protruding under lip which marked his line, and proclaimed him a descendant of Charles V. A fair silken moustache shaded his upper lip, and with a slight pointed beard in some degree counteracted the effeminacy of his expression. In stature he was tall, and his person well proportioned, though slender. His manner was high bred and haughty. His vestments were of carnation satin embroidered with black silk and gold, and displayed his elegant figure to great advantage. Around his neck he wore the Toison d'Or, and the cross of Santiago was embroidered on his mantle. Naturally indolent and feeble in character, the young king was entirely governed by his favourite and mi-

nister, the Conde-Duque de Olivarez, but he possessed highly cultivated tastes, and was a great patron of art and letters.

Philip's two brothers, as we have said, were merely boys — the elder, Don Carlos, not being more than fifteen — but they were well-grown, well-favoured striplings, and promised to become fine-looking men. In aspect and manner, the Infante Don Carlos differed totally from his brothers. His expression was thoughtful, and his countenance was stamped with a gravity far beyond his years. His features were regular, his complexion dark, his eyes large and black, and his hair, which he wore short, of the same hue. His gravity and dark complexion delighted the people, who remarked, when he showed himself among them, "At last we have got a prince of our own colour." Don Carlos had no particular title or post, but, as heir to the throne, ranked as second person in the kingdom. He had a large revenue, and was allowed precisely the same wardrobe as the king. His costume on the present occasion was of carnation satin, embroidered like that of his royal brother.

The Infante Don Fernando was fair, with blonde locks, tender blue eyes, and a skin soft and smooth as that of a girl. Indeed, with his slim figure and regular features, he looked like a damsel habited as a page. His habiliments were of black velvet.

Young as he was, the Infante Don Fernando was a prince of the Church, having already acquired the dignity of cardinal. He was also Archbishop of Toledo, accounted the highest spiritual dignity in Christendom after the Papacy, inasmuch as the Chancellorship of Castile was annexed to it, and he possessed the large annual revenue of three hundred thousand crowns. At the moment when Charles's eye fell upon him, the boy-cardinal, archbishop, and chancellor, who had infinitely more the air of a page than of a grave ecclesiastical dignitary, was conversing with the Papal Nuncio, who formed one of the party, and occupied a seat between him and the king.

One person alone remains to be described — perhaps the most attractive of the party. This was the young queen, Elizabeth of France. She was only just nineteen, and consequently still in the spring of her beauty. But she was very lovely, and had a noble figure. Her transparently white skin set off to perfection her splendid black eyes, arched brows, and rich black tresses. The young queen had great vivacity of manner, laughed frequently so as to display her pearly teeth, and her looks and gestures were so eloquent and expressive that Charles almost fancied he could understand what she said.

Not much time, however, was allowed him for

further observation, for it soon became evident that the party was about to break up. The Nuncio was the first to rise. Respectfully saluting their majesties, he retired, being conducted to the side-door by the mayor-domo mayor, the Conde de Puebla. Shortly afterwards the king and queen prepared to depart, and, while taking leave of the Infanta, her majesty embraced her tenderly. The royal pair, followed by the two young princes, and a crowd of courtiers and attendants, and preceded by the Conde de Puebla, passed out at the side-door.

The only person now left of the royal party was the Infanta, and she lingered because Gondomar had made her understand that he had some intelligence to communicate to her.

"What have you to say to me, count?" she whispered, as the attention of the meninos and damsels of honour was diverted by the departure of their majesties.

"Prepare yourself for a great surprise, princesa," replied Gondomar, in the same tone. "He is here."

"He! — who?" exclaimed the Infanta, fixing her large eyes inquiringly upon him.

"Who else could it be but your lover, Don Carlos Estuardo?" replied Gondomar.

"You amaze me!" she cried, blushing deeply. "I did not know the prince was in Madrid."

"He has only just arrived, and no one will be made aware of the circumstance till to-morrow," replied Gondomar. "But he could not control his impatience to behold you, so I consented to bring him here, and make you acquainted with his presence."

"Where — where is he?" demanded the Infanta, in a voice tremulous with emotion, and scarcely daring to look round.

"Yonder — on the right — disguised as a page."

"Heavens! if he should be discovered!" cried the Infanta, with increasing emotion.

"Calm yourself, princesa, or you will attract attention. He is dying to say a word to you."

"It must not be," she replied. "He is imprudent to venture here at all. You should not have brought him, count."

"I could not resist his passionate prayers," said Gondomar. "Neither would you blame me, if you had heard him. Have you not a word for him, princesa?"

"I know not what to say. Tell him — say I bid him welcome."

"Is that all? It is but little, methinks, for a lover who has come so far to behold his mistress."

"No more, my lord. We shall be observed."

On this, Gondomar bowed and fell back, but he kept his eye fixed upon the Infanta.

For a moment she looked irresolute. She then called to her dueña, Doña Elvira de Medanilla, a stately, middle-aged dame with a severe aspect, who had luckily been engaged with Padre Ambrosio, the Infanta's confessor, during the foregoing discourse, and signified her intention of retiring. This was the signal for the meninos and meninas to withdraw, and they accordingly made their reverences to the Infanta, and departed — the pages trooping off in one direction, and the maids of honour in another.

As soon as they were gone, the Infanta made a gracious movement to Gondomar, and moved slowly down the grand saloon, attended by Doña Elvira. They passed close by Charles, who bowed reverentially as they drew near.

Then for the first time the eyes of the lovers met, and it was only by a great effort that Charles repressed the impulse that prompted him to spring forward and throw himself at the Infanta's feet. He was still watching her departing figure, as she glided down the saloon, when he was joined by Gondomar.

"What think you of your mistress, prince?" inquired the count.

"She is an adorable creature," replied Charles. "Oh! that I could have said one word to her! To *be so* near and yet be debarred from speech — 'tis

enough to drive one mad! But look!" he added, with an irrepressible exclamation of delight. "She returns — and alone."

"Nothing like a woman's wit," said Gondomar. "She has contrived to give her dueña the slip, and will afford your highness the opportunity you so eagerly desire of exchanging a word with her."

As they spoke, the Infanta, who had left Doña Elvira at the lower end of the salon, came on quickly. Gondomar, followed by Charles, advanced to meet her.

"I have forgotten my fan, count," said the Infanta, as she approached. "I must have left it on the table with the music."

"I will bring it to you in an instant, princesa," cried Gondomar, flying towards the table.

The eagerly-desired moment had come. Charles was alone with the Infanta. But his agitation was so great that he could scarcely profit by the opportunity.

"Forgive me for thus presenting myself before you, princess," he cried, at length. "Love has brought me to Madrid — love for you, princess. Love, therefore, must plead my excuse. Your image cheered me on during my long and toilsome journey, and when I arrived here this evening, I was determined, at all hazards, to behold you. I have,

therefore, presented myself to you in this guise. Forgive me, princess! forgive me!"

"You plead so earnestly, prince, that I must forgive you," she replied. "I ought not to have granted this interview — so contrary to etiquette and propriety. But I could not allow you to go away without telling you how sensible I am of your gallantry and devotion."

"Oh, princess!" exclaimed Charles, passionately. "I dare not throw myself at your feet and tell you how much I adore you. But I implore you to satisfy me that my love is not unrequited."

"I think I can love you, prince," she rejoined. "But I must consult others before I dare answer the question explicitly."

"What others?" cried Charles. "In such a case you have only to consult your own heart."

"But I have been taught that in trusting to such guidance I may be misled," replied the Infanta. "My feelings may deceive me."

"Say not so, princess!" cried Charles. "The heart never deceives. It will not be tutored. Speak, then, according to its dictates, and answer me frankly — can you love me?"

"I am forbidden — strictly forbidden — to answer such a question, prince, without the king, my brother's, consent," she replied.

"Who has forbidden you?" demanded Charles.

"My confessor, Padre Ambrosio — my dueña, Doña Elvira — all who have charge of me," returned the Infanta.

"Have they ever spoken to you of me?" asked Charles.

"Often. They are constantly talking about you. They describe you as a charming young prince, but —"

"But what?" cried Charles. "Do not hesitate to tell me."

"They say you have one great fault, which counterbalances all your merits. You are a heretic."

"Why, so I am in religion, but not in love, sweetest Maria," returned Charles, smiling. "But I mean to allow you the free exercise of your faith. Will not that suffice? It ought, methinks."

"It would be far better if you could conform to my faith," said the Infanta. "There would then be no obstacle to our union, and I should feel that it would be approved by Heaven. You would then be without a fault, and I could give you my entire affection."

"And can you not give it me as it is?" demanded Charles.

"I cannot promise," she rejoined. "I must first try to convert you."

"The effort will be vain, princess," said Charles. "My religious tenets are unchangeable. But I pro-

mise you — and indeed the king my father has solemnly engaged for me — that you shall have the full and free exercise of your own faith — you and your children. That is all I can do. Is it not enough?"

"I must consider," replied the Infanta. "I must consult Padre Ambrosio."

"I feel I have an enemy in your confessor, princess," said Charles. "But I did not anticipate a discussion like this on our first meeting."

"It is best we should understand each other, prince," she returned. "I am a devout Catholic."

"You are a bigot, but a very charming one, Maria," said Charles.

At this moment Gondomar returned.

"Your fan, princesa," he said, bowing and delivering it to her.

"You have been long, count," she remarked, with a smile.

"Nay, madam, I feared to interrupt."

"Adios, prince," cried the Infanta to Charles. "Think of what I have said to you."

"One word more before we part, Maria?" he cried.

She made no response, but tripped off to her dueña.

"All has gone well, I trust, prince?" inquired Gondomar.

"The Infanta is charming, but somewhat bigoted," returned Charles. "She has told me plainly that she will convert me, and I have told her equally plainly that she will fail in the attempt."

"This is the work of her confessor, Padre Ambrosio, who has enjoined her to make your highness's adoption of the faith of Rome the price of her hand," said Gondomar. "But rest easy. The king will give her to you without any conditions. But now that our object has been attained, the sooner we depart the better."

They then quitted the saloon. In the antechamber through which they had to pass several courtiers were collected, and Gondomar was obliged to stop for a moment to speak to them. Charles moved on to a short distance, and waited for him.

As soon as Gondomar could disengage himself, he was hurrying towards the prince, when a tall, handsome young man, attired in murrey-coloured velvet, and possessing a very striking physiognomy, stopped him.

"A moment, count," said the young man. "Oblige me with the name of yonder page. It is the first time I have seen him in the palace. He has a very remarkable countenance, and a very stately figure. I should like to paint him."

"I will tell him so," replied Gondomar. "He will be proud to hear that he has attracted the at-

tention of so great a painter as Don Diego Velasquez de Silva."

"But you do not tell me his name, count," said Velasquez.

"You shall know it to-morrow, Don Diego," returned Gondomar, hastily.

"Meantime, I will tell it you," rejoined Velasquez. "I noticed him in the grand saloon just now, and I then suspected who he was, though, as he kept aloof, I could not be quite sure. But now I have no doubt whatever on the point. There cannot be two such heads. That page, my lord, is Prince Charles of England."

"Hush!" exclaimed Gondomar. "Let your lips be fast sealed, Don Diego."

"Fear not, my lord," said Velasquez. "The prince's secret is safe with me. I dare not make the request, but if his highness will deign to sit to me for his portrait, he will confer the greatest obligation upon me."

"I will not fail to mention the matter to him, Don Diego," replied Gondomar. "Meantime, I rely on your secresy."

With this he bowed to Velasquez, and rejoining Charles, told him what had just occurred, mentioning, at the same time, the request of the great *painter.*

"It will gratify him deeply if your highness thinks fit to comply with it," he said.

"He shall paint my portrait for the Infanta, as a companion picture to the one painted by him of her highness, which is in my possession," rejoined Charles. "Tell him so."

"I will make him happy at once," replied Gondomar.

And he flew back to Velasquez, whose dark cheek flushed, and whose eyes brightened, as the message was communicated to him. Placing his hand upon his heart with a look of ineffable gratitude, he bowed to the prince, who graciously returned the salute.

All this passed with great rapidity, and fortunately did not attract attention.

In another minute Charles and Gondomar were traversing corridors and passages, making their way towards Pepe's lodging, which they reached without further interruption. Here the prince resumed his own attire with as much expedition as possible, and having warmly thanked the menino for the service he had rendered him, he proceeded with Gondomar to the great court, where they found the coach waiting for them.

Ere long they had reached the House of Seven Chimneys, and alighting in the plazuela, at once repaired to the garden gate. On unlocking it, they

found the Earl of Bristol, who was keeping watch, wrapped in his cloak.

Gondomar then took his leave, promising to make his appearance at an early hour on the morrow, to receive the prince's commands.

"Heaven be praised your highness has got back in safety!" exclaimed Bristol. "Have you seen the Infanta?"

"Seen her and spoken with her," replied Charles.

"Amazement!" cried the earl. "This is indeed a romantic incident."

"You will say so, my lord, when you learn all particulars," replied the prince.

Having secured the gate, the earl conducted the prince to the house. All the inmates had retired to rest, but a collation was laid out in one of the lower rooms. Charles, however, declined to partake of it, and was at once taken to the spacious chamber prepared for him. A magnificent couch invited him to repose, and shortly afterwards, throwing himself upon it, he sunk into slumber.

III.

The White Dove.

THE windows of the chamber in which Charles slept looked towards the garden, and as he arose, perfectly refreshed by a night of sound repose, he

attired himself without waiting for his attendants, and threw open the casement. The morning was bright and beautiful, the sky cloudless and of the deepest blue, and a gentle breeze came laden with the scent of orange-blossoms and fragrant flowers.

Beyond the garden walls, on the left, arose the roof of the convent of San Francisco, with a church adjoining it, the bells of which were now jingling musically. On the right, through an opening amid the houses, could be seen in the distance the lofty range of the Guadarrama mountains, with their jagged peaks covered with snow. The garden itself, with its orange-groves, its tall cypresses, its two large mulberry-trees, each with a seat beneath it, its parterres and pleasant walks, adorned with statues and marble urns filled with flowers, seemed to invite him to stroll forth.

A charming concert arose from the trees, and Charles was listening to the melodious strains poured forth by the little warblers, when a snow-white dove, which had been gently cooing in one of the mulberry-trees, flew towards the casement at which he stood, and, without manifesting the slightest alarm, alighted on the sill close beside him. Charles did not move, for fear of disturbing the bird, and there it remained pluming itself and regarding him with its lovely eyes, until the opening of the chamber door scared it away. Greatly to Charles's satis-

faction, however, the dove almost instantly returned, and settled on the same spot. The person who had just entered the chamber was Sir Richard Graham, and the prince pointed out his pretty visitor to him.

"The appearance of this beautiful bird, the emblem of all that is pure and holy, at a juncture like the present, may be accepted as a fortunate omen," said Charles. "Do you not think so, Sir Richard?"

"Assuredly, your highness," replied Graham. "But to my mind the dove looks like a love-messenger, and may have a letter from the Infanta under its wing."

"Poh! that is an idle thought," replied Charles. "The poor bird brings me no letter, but it gives me hope."

"A propos of letters, I have one for your highness," remarked Graham.

"From the king my father?" cried Charles, eagerly.

"No," replied Graham. "You will be surprised when you learn from whom it comes. I pray your highness to observe the superscription — 'Al muy noble, y muy ilustre Señor, Don Carlos Estuardo.'"

"Who can have written it?" cried Charles, in surprise.

"You can satisfy your curiosity by breaking the seal," said Graham. "But, before doing so, let me

offer you an agreeable piece of information. The two barbs given you by the Duke de Cea have been sent back."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the prince.

"They were brought here by two muleteers before daylight this morning," said Graham, "and are now safe in the stables of the House of Seven Chimneys. Perhaps that letter may relate to them."

"Prithee, read it to me," said Charles.

Graham then opened the letter, and read aloud as follows:

"SERENISIMO SEÑOR!

"Though a robber, I am a man of honour.

"Your highness will, therefore, conceive how deep must have been my displeasure on finding that two of my band, Melchior and Geronimo, had dared to carry off the horses which your highness and the noble marquis accompanying you had condescended to take in exchange for your barbs.

"In order to meet the justice of the case, and as an example to their comrades, I immediately caused both rascals to be shot. I trust their punishment will be satisfactory to your highness.

"But, after an occurrence so opposed to my notions of honourable conduct, I cannot think of retaining the barbs, and I therefore send them back to your highness and the noble marquis, with a

profound expression of regret for the annoyance you have experienced.

"Your highness will not be surprised that I am acquainted with your exalted rank, as well as with the rank of your noble companion, when I inform you that a courier from London, bearing despatches from your royal father, and two couriers from Paris, with despatches mentioning your visit to that capital, are now in my hands. These couriers shall remain for twelve hours in the Somosierra, as I have reason to believe their detention for that time will be agreeable to your highness. They shall then come on with the despatches.

"Your highness, I trust, will credit me when I state that, had I been aware at the time whom I had the honour of escorting, you should never have known me as other than Capitan Mendez.

"Viva le Principe de Inglaterra!

"El Cortejo."

"A strange epistle!" exclaimed Charles, laughing. "This fellow piques himself upon his nice sense of honour. He richly deserves it, no doubt, but I should be sorry to see him hanged.

"He deserves to be rewarded rather than hanged," rejoined Graham. "He has made all the amends in his power by shooting those two rascals and sending back the barbs. In fact, he has ren-

dered your highness an important service. Had he not detained the couriers, your arrival in Madrid must have been known last night, and then you could not have taken the king and Olivarez by surprise."

"Nor have visited the palace last night," said Charles, smiling.

"Is it possible you did so?" cried Graham, in amazement. "I thought your highness had retired to rest early."

"I spent more than an hour at the palace, and saw the whole of the royal family in their privacy."

"Without making yourself known?"

"Without making myself known — save to the Infanta."

"By Heaven! you have done wonders!" exclaimed Graham. "The Duke de Cea spoke of the strictness of Spanish court etiquette, and declared it would be impossible for your highness to obtain a private interview with the Infanta."

"De Cea was wrong, Dick. The impossibility has already been accomplished," replied Charles, laughing.

"In truth, your highness is a veritable preux chevalier, and has come to conquer," said Graham. "The affair is already settled."

"Not quite," rejoined Charles, gravely. "I should

have felt rather despondent this morning, had not that dove cheered me."

Just at this moment the door was opened by Buckingham, who unceremoniously entered, accompanied by Gondomar. The marquis was arrayed in the splendid habiliments which he had procured from Marolles in Paris.

"I have to congratulate your highness on your success last night," he said. "You have begun the game admirably, and have won the first stake. Gondomar tells me you have not only seen the Infanta, but conversed with her."

"I owe my success entirely to the count's management," said Charles. "But on calm reflection I feel it was a very rash proceeding, and ought not to have been undertaken."

"Repentance comes too late," said Buckingham. "But I see nothing to regret."

"Having just come from the palace," said Gondomar, "I am able to give your highness positive assurance that your secret visit is wholly unsuspected. In fact, no rumour whatever of your arrival at Madrid has as yet got abroad. I have come here to learn your pleasure, but as certain formalities must be observed, I will venture to suggest that my lord of Buckingham shall accompany me to acquaint his majesty with your arrival."

"Precisely the course I meant to enjoin," said

Charles. "Go at once. I will not stir forth till you return. Yet stay!" he added, arresting their departure. "It may be proper to consult my lord of Bristol before you take this step."

"I cannot consult Bristol on any point," said Buckingham, haughtily. "If your highness thinks fit, let him go with Gondomar. But in that case they must go without me."

"Nay, in Heaven's name, go!" said Charles, who was well aware of the jealous nature of his favourite.

Buckingham and Gondomar then bowed and withdrew, and as the door closed upon them, Charles muttered to himself, "Henceforward I shall be a mere puppet in the hands of others — to be played with as they think proper."

Shortly afterwards, the prince took a solitary stroll in the garden to enjoy the beauty of the morning, and think over his interview with the Infanta. With mixed emotions, he recalled each word she had uttered, and, in spite of all his efforts to shake it off, a fear came over him that his hopes would be blighted. To lose the Infanta would be worse than death. Yet it was possible, from what she had said, that religious differences might separate them.

While indulging in these meditations, he had seated himself beneath one of the mulberry-trees.

A slight noise attracted his attention, and looking up, he perceived that the milk-white dove had settled over his head.

"That gentle bird gives me new hope," he ejaculated. "I will cast off all doubt and despondency. The Infanta will be mine."

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